

**Submission
No 571**

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Submission to the NSW Select Committee on Proposed Energy from Waste Facilities

From a Resident of Southern Goulburn Mulwaree Region

Introduction

I write as a resident of the Southern Goulburn Mulwaree region—the very community the NSW Government has designated as one of only four locations in the state to burn Sydney’s rubbish under its so-called “Energy from Waste” program. What is being proposed for Tarago by Veolia is not progress; it is environmental injustice, regulatory capture and regional discrimination disguised as policy.

1. The Tarago Proposal Is Fundamentally Inappropriate

Under the Committee’s Terms of Reference, you are examining the *performance, emissions, health and agricultural impacts* of these technologies. On every one of those tests, Veolia’s proposal fails.

Veolia’s “Advanced Energy Recovery Centre” is planned directly adjacent to its existing Woodlawn landfill—already notorious for 20 years of licence breaches, stench that travels kilometres, leachate that leaks into waterways, and a complete failure of NSW EPA oversight. To suggest that the same company should now be entrusted to burn Sydney’s waste is unconscionable. The EPA has proven itself incapable of regulating even Veolia’s existing landfill operations; it has no credibility to regulate a complex high-temperature incinerator producing thousands of tonnes of toxic ash each year.

2. Health Impacts on Communities and Water Catchments

Clause (d) of your inquiry asks you to consider impacts on *human health, rainwater harvesting and soil contamination*. Every household in Tarago and the surrounding districts relies on rainwater for drinking. Incinerators release fine particulate matter (PM2.5 and smaller), dioxins, furans, heavy metals and ultrafine nanoparticles that settle onto roofs and soils. These contaminants bioaccumulate—entering water tanks, livestock and gardens.

International studies—including those cited by the European Environment Agency and in multiple peer-reviewed journals—show higher rates of cancer, respiratory disease and developmental disorders near waste-to-energy facilities. No safe limit exists for these cumulative pollutants, particularly in tank-water-dependent communities.

The EPA and Veolia insist new technology makes these facilities “safe”. Yet the *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan* (Ref 1) admits that the so-called “advanced energy recovery” technologies proposed for Tarago and Parkes are not employed anywhere else on the Eastern Seaboard and that NSW is “enabling energy from waste to maintain waste collection services”. This is not innovation—it is an experiment on rural people.

3. Impact on Agriculture and Local Economies

Clause (e) of your Terms of Reference rightly highlights impacts on *agriculture locally and across the wider region*. The Southern Tablelands is a productive agricultural district—fruit orchards, beef and lamb properties, olive groves, vineyards and market gardens all thrive here. Our produce feeds Canberra and Sydney markets. Any contamination, even perceived, will destroy farm reputations overnight. Who compensates our farmers when dioxins and heavy metals are

detected in their soil or produce? Who pays when “Tarago” becomes synonymous with toxic ash and PFAS?

The *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan* (Ref 1) absurdly claims incinerators will “build resilience” and “create economic opportunity”. In truth, this proposal threatens existing jobs in agriculture and tourism while providing at best a handful of highly specialised positions, often filled from outside the region. It will deter the very “tree-change” and small-enterprise growth the Goulburn Mulwaree Council has worked hard to nurture.

4. Environmental Contamination and Bioaccumulation

Tarago sits within the Sydney water catchment. Prevailing winds and rainfall patterns mean pollutants emitted from Veolia’s stacks will deposit across the Mulwaree River system, Wollondilly headwaters and productive farmland. Dioxins, mercury and PFAS do not disappear—they accumulate in soil, water and living tissue. The *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan’s* (Ref 1) own discussion of PFAS concedes it is “*an emerging area of study internationally*” and that assessments are based on “desktop analysis” using “reference facility data where this can be reasonably obtained”—in other words, guesswork.

To pretend these risks can be “managed” by licence conditions is a dangerous fiction. The EPA’s record at Woodlawn—two decades of odour complaints, un-remediated leachate leaks and toothless enforcement—proves otherwise. There is no level of monitoring that can make waste incineration safe in a rural water-catchment environment.

5. The Circular Economy Myth and Policy Capture

The *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan* (Ref 1) released on 23 October 2025, exposes the government’s capture by the waste industry. Instead of accelerating recycling, reuse and repair, it devotes entire chapters to “*enabling energy from waste*” and “*streamlining planning processes to fast-track approvals*”. It is not a circular economy plan—it is an incinerator rollout plan.

The Minister’s own message warns that “red bins may not be collected in Sydney” and uses this manufactured crisis to justify building incinerators in the bush. This is classic scare-mongering designed to hand multibillion-dollar corporations guaranteed waste streams and profits. As Toxics Free Australia observed in its media statement of 23 October 2025 (Ref 2), the government has “*rolled out the red carpet for the waste industry*”, giving Veolia, Cleanaway and others a free pass while ignoring global moves to phase out incineration. Across Europe, facilities are closing because they lock economies into waste generation and emit more greenhouse gases than coal per unit of energy produced.

6. Regulatory Failure and Conflict of Interest

The EPA portrays itself as an independent regulator, yet the *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan* (Ref 1) reveals it is now also a “*lead agency for strategic waste infrastructure planning*”. How can the same body promote and regulate incinerators? This structural conflict destroys public confidence. The EPA’s long failure to control Veolia’s odour, leachate and truck pollution at Woodlawn shows what “oversight” really means—letters and lip service, not enforcement.

7. Political Hypocrisy and Regional Injustice

The current NSW Environment Minister once publicly opposed waste incinerators in Western Sydney, citing health risks and environmental harm. Now, as Minister, she is imposing those

very risks on regional communities. History will judge this betrayal harshly. Incinerators are banned in metropolitan Sydney because they are unsafe for people living there. For the Government to then declare Tarago, Parkes, Lithgow and Tomago “precincts” suitable for those same facilities is regional discrimination of the highest order.

Tarago does not meet the government’s own criteria for an “Energy from Waste Precinct” (Ref 3). It is environmentally sensitive, climatically unsuited, agriculturally productive, and lacks any local demand for the energy produced. There is no industrial network requiring heat or electricity. Any power generated would be fed into the grid at minimal efficiency while toxic residues remain here forever. This is not “resilience”—it is environmental dumping.

8. Alternatives Exist

Clause (i) of your Terms of Reference directs attention to *alternative solutions* for Sydney’s waste. They are many:

- Comprehensive source separation and extended producer responsibility laws.
- Investment in FOGO, recycling, reuse and repair infrastructure in Sydney where waste is generated.
- Mandatory product stewardship for packaging and e-waste.
- Ban on single-use and non-recyclable plastics.

These solutions create far more jobs than incineration and truly advance a circular economy.

9. Conclusion

The Veolia incinerator proposal for Tarago is toxic—literally and politically. It threatens human health, contaminates our water, undermines agriculture, divides communities and entrenches regional inequality. It is being advanced by a government enthralled by corporate lobbyists and by an EPA that has become a partner to industry rather than a protector of the environment.

I urge the Committee to:

1. **Recommend an immediate moratorium** on all waste-to-energy proposals in NSW. We can do better and we must – the health of our environment and future generations depend on it. Stop listening to the waste industry, those who work for them and those who have been captured by them and start listening to independent health and environmental scientific experts.
2. **Reject Veolia’s Tarago proposal outright** as incompatible with the surrounding catchment, agricultural and residential land uses.
3. **Call for a statewide ban on waste incineration**, including in so-called regional “precincts”.
4. **Recommend redirecting investment** to genuine circular-economy initiatives—reuse, repair, recycling and local manufacturing.
5. **Recommend an overhaul of the EPA** they are failing the state. They cannot be allowed to continue selectively promoting the waste industry’s flawed logic while claiming to be an independent environmental regulator.

The people of Southern Goulburn Mulwaree do not consent to becoming the sacrifice zone for Sydney’s convenience. We will not allow our clean air, our farms, our water or our children’s

health to be collateral damage in the Government's partnership with waste multinationals. This Committee has a chance to give integrity, science and fairness a voice before our future is condemned by the Government's toxic, unjust and dishonest incinerator policies. Please do not waste it.

Submitted by:

Rod Thiele

A resident of the Southern Goulburn Mulwaree region, October 2025

References:

1. NSW Environment Protection Authority, *NSW Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan (October 2025)* - <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-09/25p4616-nsw-waste-and-circular-infrastructure-plan.pdf>
2. Toxics Free Australia, *Media Statement: NSW Government Rolls Out the Red Carpet for Waste Incinerators* (23 Oct 2025) - <https://www.toxicsfreeaustralia.org.au/blog/nsw-government-rolls-out-the-red-carpet-for-waste-incinerators/>
3. NSW EPA, *Energy from Waste in NSW – “Precincts”*, (23 Oct 2025) - <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Your-environment/Waste/waste-and-circular-infrastructure-plan/energy-from-waste-nsw>