

**Submission  
No 576**

## **INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES**

**Name:** Ms Judy Bell  
**Date Received:** 24 October 2025

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# **Submission to the Inquiry on the Proposed Parkes Energy from Waste Facility**

Submitted by: Judy Bell

Location: Peak Hill, Bogan River People, Bulgandramine, NSW, Wiradyuri Country

Date: 24 October 2025

## 1. Introduction

My name is Judy Bell. I am Wiradyuri, born and raised on my traditional country of Peak Hill, with strong cultural foundations, songlines and ongoing custodianship of Peak Hill and surrounds, also a resident of the Parkes Shire region

I am writing to make a submission to the Inquiry regarding the proposed Parkes Energy from Waste (EfW) Facility. As a Wiradyuri woman, a mother, Grandmother, daughter, sister and aunty, I wish to express my deep concern about the potential cultural, environmental, health, and social impacts this project poses for me, my family, my Wiradyuri people and the wider community.

Our connection to Country is central to who we are. The land, water, and air are part of our identity, spirituality, and wellbeing. When Country is damaged, so are we. It is vital that any decisions about development on Wiradyuri land are made with our involvement, consent, and cultural respect.

## 2. Lack of Consultation and Cultural Exclusion

There has been little to no genuine consultation or consideration with the local Wiradyuri community and traditional custodians about this project. To my knowledge, the Peak Hill Local Aboriginal Land Council (PHLALC), Bogan River Traditional Owners, and local Peak Hill Elders were not properly consulted in the planning or decision-making process.

Consultation should not be a box-ticking exercise. It must follow the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), allowing Traditional Custodians the time and opportunity to understand, discuss, and influence decisions that directly affect their Country. It needs to be done culturally responsively, with considerations at the organisational level requiring reform of the cultural and historical factors affecting the governance, procedures and policies of services. It requires respect for, and inclusion of local Wiradyuri and custodians' self-determination, cultures and cultural practices.

When consultation is not done properly, it repeats old patterns of exclusion and disrespect toward Aboriginal people, more specific in this case, the local Wiradyuri and Traditional Custodians. True consultation means listening, not informing after the fact.

### 3. Risks to Culturally Significant Areas and Wiradyuri Heritage

The proposed site sits in Wiradyuri Country, where the Bogan and Lachlan Rivers connect communities, families, and stories. These waterways are sacred — they are part of our identity and spiritual law. These waterways also include waterways connected to the Murrumbidgee, Macquarie, Castlereagh, Bell Rivers, including the Barwon and Darling Rivers. These rivers are living entities — carriers of story, law, and life — that connect Wiradyuri communities across Peak Hill, Condobolin, Wellington, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Forbes, Cowra, Wagga, Nyngan, Brewarrina and Bourke.

The projects concerning risks are:

- Damaging or disturbing sacred and cultural sites.
- Polluting waterways and soils that are vital to our food, medicine, and cultural practices.
- Disrupting the natural balance of Country, which carries deep spiritual meaning for our people.

For Wiradyuri people, Country is not just land — it is family. Any disturbance to Country affects the wellbeing, our *“knowing, being and doing”* for us, our ancestors, our children, and our future generations.

### 4. Health, Environmental, and Social Risks

I am deeply concerned about the potential environmental and health impacts of the proposed EfW facility. These risks are particularly serious for Aboriginal communities, more specifically, to the local Wiradyuri people, who have an ongoing strong cultural, spiritual, and historical connections to our land, water and sky.

Key risks include:

- Air pollution and toxic emissions: Industrial emissions from waste facilities are known to exacerbate respiratory conditions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 2.2 times more likely to experience chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and 1.6 times more likely to report asthma than non-Indigenous Australians. Hospitalisation rates for respiratory conditions remain significantly higher among Aboriginal populations, placing these communities at elevated risk from pollutants.
  - Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) and Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) are preventable diseases disproportionately affecting Aboriginal people living in regional and remote areas of Australia. First Nations people in Australia have

one of the highest recorded rates of ARF and RHD in the world and large disparities exist between First Nations people and other Australians

- Increase renal diseases
  - Increase in certain cancers
  - Increase in reproductive issues
- **Water contamination:** Many Aboriginal communities rely on local catchments or tank water. Contamination from industrial facilities will expose communities to harmful substances, including, but not limited to - heavy metals and chemical by-products. Access to safe drinking water is already a concern, highlighting the disproportionate impact of any additional contamination risk.
  - **Soil degradation and biodiversity loss:** Soil and ecosystems hold cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance. Native plants and animals that form part of our local Wiradyuri totems, stories, and traditional practices are particularly vulnerable to industrial pollution and habitat loss.
  - **Noise, odour, and vermin:** These factors reduce the quality of life and wellbeing for nearby residents, with documented impacts on mental health and social cohesion.
  - **Mental and emotional stress:** Living near an industrial waste facility can cause substantial stress and anxiety, particularly for Aboriginal families who have historically fought to protect their land and heritage. Aboriginal people experience higher rates of psychological distress and poorer social and emotional wellbeing due to historical and ongoing colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and systemic disadvantage. This will be exacerbated as many local services could be diminished as service providers close or relocate to a location that is not impacted by the incinerator.

## 5. Economic and Equity Concerns

This project places an unfair burden on regional communities like Parkes, which are being forced to take Sydney's waste even though similar facilities are banned in other parts of NSW for health reasons.

The project will also:

- Affect local farms, soil health, and livestock, impacting livelihoods.
- Reduce property values and deter tourism and investment.
- Fail to deliver real economic benefits and services to the local Aboriginal people and communities who are already faced with adversity and hardship.

Regional communities, and our community, deserve the same level of protection as metropolitan areas.

Our region should not be treated as a dumping ground.

## 6. Cultural, Social, and Emotional Impacts

This proposal has already created distress and uncertainty in the community. Many people feel ignored, unsafe, and disempowered.

For myself, and the local Wiradyuri people, these impacts are not only physical but also spiritual and emotional. The thought of an incinerator operating on our Country, near our Significant and Sacred Places, causes grief and fear for what it means for the land, our children, and our cultural future.

## 7. Recommendations

I respectfully ask the Inquiry to:

1. Reject approval for the Parkes Energy from Waste project, or pause until full and independent cultural, environmental, and health assessments are completed.
2. Ensure full consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders – the local Wiradyuri, Traditional owners, the Peak Hill LALC, in accordance with state and federal obligations.
3. Establish an independent Aboriginal advisory group to oversee cultural, heritage, and environmental management, to be instated also within Parkes Shire Council.
4. Commission independent research (not industry-funded) into the health, cultural and environmental effects of waste incineration – including air, water, soil and biodiversity studies, with a focus on Aboriginal communities.
5. Respect the principles of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Aboriginal cultural heritage laws to protect sacred sites, native flora and fauna, and traditional practices.
6. Invest in waste reduction, reuse, and recycling programs, including innovative non-combustion technologies.
7. Create local training and employment programs that deliver real benefits to the community and respect environmental and cultural values.

## 8. Conclusion

I strongly oppose the proposed Energy from Waste facility at Parkes in its current form. The risks to our health, our environment, and our cultural heritage are too great.

My people, the local Wiradyuri people have lived, cared for, and sustained this Country for thousands of years. We deserve to be part of decisions that affect it. I ask that this Inquiry uphold the principles of respect, fairness, and environmental justice — not just for the Peak Hill Wiradyuri people, but for the entire Parkes Shire community.

I come from a large family of strong, cultural leaders, who are standing together, with Wiradyuri, in saying NO, to oppose this facility, in continuing our cultural obligations in protecting and preserving Country.

In solidarity with our community – Peak Hill, Parkes, and surrounds, we stand together, respectfully asking the Parliamentary Committee to reject the proposed Parkes Waste-to-Energy Facility.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

Yindyamarra — respect, gentleness, and honour — should guide every decision made on Wiradyuri Country.