

**Submission
No 622**

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Mr John O'Brien

Date Received: 27 October 2025

I have been a resident of Parkes for 41 years. I am a member of the local farming community, a property owner, and currently a third-year medical student committed to serving rural and regional New South Wales.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the construction of the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) facility within the Parkes Special Activation Precinct. My concerns relate to the potential health, environmental, social, and economic impacts this development could have on the Parkes community and surrounding agricultural regions.

1. Environmental and Health Concerns

As a farmer and future healthcare professional, I am deeply concerned about the influx of waste materials into our area and the potential release of harmful pollutants through combustion and emissions.

While proponents may argue that EfW technology is “safe,” even trace emissions of dioxins, heavy metals, or ultrafine particulates could have significant long-term health impacts, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and those with respiratory illnesses.

From a public health perspective, the burden of chronic disease linked to air quality is already substantial in rural Australia. Introducing industrial emissions into a clean, inland community such as Parkes risks eroding our population’s health advantage and damaging trust in local environmental governance.

2. Impact on Agriculture and the Rural Identity of Parkes

The agricultural industry is the backbone of our local economy and identity. Parkes’ reputation as a clean, sustainable, and food-producing region is central to both our livelihoods and community pride.

The transport, storage, and incineration of waste—particularly from outside the region—poses real risks to soil, water, and air quality, which in turn may affect agricultural production and consumer confidence in local produce.

Moreover, any perception of contamination or industrialisation of our landscape will have enduring effects on property values, tourism, and rural amenity.

3. Social and Economic Implications

As a local property owner, I am concerned about the potential reduction in property values and loss of community appeal should this project proceed. Once an area is perceived as hosting large-scale waste infrastructure, recovery of reputation is extremely difficult.

The long-term social cost—through population stagnation, business withdrawal, and loss of professional services—could outweigh any short-term economic benefits promised by the development.

Personally, I have a deep commitment to rural health and have planned to remain in Parkes as a future rural doctor, contributing to the region’s medical workforce. However, if this proposal goes ahead, I will need to seriously reconsider my future in this town due to concerns about environmental safety, air quality, and community wellbeing.

4. Transparency, Community Consultation, and Alternatives

I am also concerned about the limited and inconsistent community consultation surrounding this project. For a facility of such significance, there must be transparent, independent health and environmental assessments and genuine local engagement, not just technical summaries full of meaningless buzz words (If I hear the words "Circular closed loop" ill scream) or token meetings.

Before approving such a project, I urge the Committee to explore alternative waste management approaches—including regional recycling expansion, organic waste recovery, and smaller-scale decentralised systems that align better with regional sustainability principles.

5. Recommendations

I respectfully request that the Committee:

- Reject the current proposal for an Energy from Waste facility in Parkes pending comprehensive, independent health and environmental risk assessments.
- Prioritise investment in sustainable waste minimisation and recycling initiatives over incineration.
- Ensure transparent consultation with Parkes residents, including full disclosure of emissions modelling and long-term monitoring plans.
- Protect regional communities like Parkes from being disproportionately burdened with metropolitan waste and environmental risk.

Conclusion

Parkes is a proud, growing, and community-focused regional centre. The introduction of a large-scale waste incineration facility would fundamentally alter its environmental integrity, economic trajectory, and social fabric.

I strongly urge the Committee to reject this proposal and instead support cleaner, community-based, and future-focused waste management solutions that reflect the values and wellbeing of regional NSW.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.