

**Submission
No 669**

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

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Date Received: 31 October 2025

My name is Erik Lensson, I'm 67 years old, have suffered from asthma all my life and was recently fitted with a heart pacemaker. My wife and I retired from the regular workforce about ten years ago and we decided to retire here in Parkes, because we love the town and country lifestyle, including gardening and growing our own vegetables, fruit – even olives, which we pickle and share with our friends and neighbours. I've established many friends in the region through work relationships and volunteering activities, including serving four years as the President of the Parkes Aero Club (PAC) and contributing to the purchase of an aircraft for the club Flying School - helping many young Parkes people on their way to a career in aviation. I also provide casual ongoing professional support for scientific and engineering endeavours at the Parkes radio telescope, due to the dearth of people with my particular skillset and who are willing to live in a small country town.

It breaks my heart to discover that the NSW Government, supported by the NSW EPA and in collusion with the Parkes Shire Council are dead set on a proposal to install an Energy from Waste incinerator at the Parkes Special Activation Precinct (SAP). I know that Parkes citizens, whilst aware of the SAP being developed as hosting various types of agricultural, recycling and transport initiatives, we were all shocked that first item to be fanfared (in March 2025) is a massive industrial incinerator, destined to burn big city red bin municipal waste from Sydney. This is a crazy idea for many reasons and it's difficult to believe that Australian's are being sucked into committing to such an act, so many years after many EU and other countries are backing away from waste incineration. Incineration is fundamentally non-circular and creates toxic emissions & difficult to dispose of residues (but you of course know that).

I came to Australia many years ago from a small Nordic arctic town, where temperatures regularly fall below -30C. My father worked on the town's district heating systems, supplied throughout the town via insulated underground pipes. When I was a child, the incinerators supplying the heat were fired with forestry waste and dried peat moss, recovered from swamp areas drained in favour of plantation forestry. In time, draining swamps became unpalatable for environmental reasons and a cousin advised me that increasing amounts of municipal waste (ie. Garbage) started to be burnt, seemingly to solve two problems. The prime initial motivation for incineration was for district heating, with (EfW) electricity being only a secondary consideration. These days, EfW is 'on the nose' in all of the Nordic countries, including literally – my cousin told me on the phone last July that it is 'snowing outside' ... but it was not snow, the snow flakes were actually ash, released due to a problem at the local WtE plant, which also contracts to burn waste from other countries, just to keep the fires burning and supplying the baseload.

By contrast, in Australia we have no obvious business case for use of the waste heat, part of the justification being some half-baked concept of '*if we build an incinerator then they will come*' for the heat. And we are told by the EPA allows burning waste if – it is used to generate electricity, but only in the specified locations outside of the 'Greater Sydney', and dismissing all health effects with some 'precautionary principle' fuzzy logic limited to 'air quality'... and lacking any proper justification about soil contamination and consequent impact on agriculture, waster harvesting for people & animals. This EPA document¹ '*NSW Energy to Waste Infrastructure Plan*' reeks of lame excuses, in response political pressure and interference by the commercial waste industry.

If this Parkes incinerator actually gets the go-ahead, despite extensive community objection, then I foresee that, with the Inland Rail system, the Parkes SAP area will certainly burn way more than the currently proposed red bin waste produced by the 5.5 million people of the 'Greater

¹ <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/21p3261-energy-from-waste-infrastructure-plan.pdf>

Sydney Basin'. Parkes SAP is actively marketed as being "...less than 12 hours from any Australian city" and all that is required is multiple incinerators.

On the other hand, if the NSW Government, the EPA are prepared to underwrite and guarantee that people, animals, crops, water resources in Parkes and the region are 100% safe against any negative health impact from the operation of the proposed EfW incinerators, then of course there is no reason why EfW facilities could not be operated at Kurnell or, say Tomago, where Rio Tinto and its workers are hungering for reliable and cheap baseload power².

Noting that:

- (i) NSW claims to be progressing towards a circular economy;
- (ii) the Greater Sydney Region is scheduled to run out of landfill by 2030;
- (iii) EfW incineration is banned in NSW, excepting specific regional locations;
- (iv) EfW incineration is banned in the ACT;
- (v) The EU and all Nordic countries are moving away from EfW incineration;
- (vi) Transporting waste 550km from Sydney to Parkes massively increases its CO2 footprint.

Considering the:

- 1) NSW Government "Parkes Special Activation Precinct Masterplan, 2019"³
- 2) NSW EPA "Energy from waste – options paper, December 2024;
- 3) NSW Chief Scientist and Engineers Report, May 2020;
- 4) NSW Energy from Waste Infrastructure Plan, September 2021;
- 5) National Waste Policy Action Plan, December 2024
- 6) a number of professional refereed papers concerned with EfW human health effects;
- 7) outright rejection of EfW incineration by numerous Australian communities;
- 8) EfW experience of United Kingdom, the Nordic and EU countries;
- 9) advice of UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights;
- 10) Stockholm Convention and Declaration, ratified by Australia in 2004;
- 11) limited amount of energy recoverable from EfW vs harmful effects.

Summation: I have come to the view that moving forward with EfW incineration:

1. is inconsistent and detrimental to the interests of public health;
2. represents a prostitution of the principles and practices of the circular economy;
3. serves to undermine and defeat the objectives of upstream waste recycling & reuse;
4. is detrimental to regional employment, especially rural health services, doctors, nurses;
5. impacts severely on the livelihoods of thousands of Australian farmers and rural townfolk;
6. is damaging to Australian food production and self-sufficiency;
7. damages Australia's international trade and reputation as a reliable source of certified food;
8. is inconsistent with Australia's commitments to Net Zero; and,
9. potentially violates Australian commitments to the human rights of its own citizens.

Conclusion: It is premature and inappropriate for the NSW Government to proceed with waste incineration at Parkes and any other of the NSW EPA identified locations. The demonstrated lack of due diligence, greenwashing and misinformation presented to the community alone is more than enough to deny the proposed Parkes EfW development any kind of a social licence.

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-30/tomago-bailout-energy-transition-rio-tinto-labor/105943642>

³ <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/Parkes-SAP>

The complete disregard for the health of a community, including indigenous persons representing some of the poorest in health, the lack of consideration for impact on agriculture and rural livelihoods is unforgiveable.

Recommendations:

- A. An immediate moratorium on all and any plans for the deployment of EfW facilities;
- B. A Royal Commissions should be instituted to look at all aspects of the:
 - (i) Conduct of public consultation for the Parkes Special Activation Masterplan;
 - (ii) the conduct of all land deals ahead and during the Parkes SAP;
 - (iii) a review of the processes applied by NSW EPA in relation to the 'Energy from Waste Infrastructure plan and the formulation of its decisions, including the selection of the EfW candidate precincts in that plan.
 - (iv) any other relevant matters.