

**Submission
No 709**

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE FACILITIES

Name: Mr David Ward
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I make this submission to the Inquiry because:

- I am worried about the long-term health impacts from toxic emissions like dioxins, furans and a range of other pollutants such as mercury, with no requirement for 24/7 monitoring of these emissions.
- This project threatens our clean air, water and soil quality. Contamination, as well as any perceived risk, threatens our agricultural sector, the Parkes area (within the stack plume) is a major food producer in the state.
- Transporting waste over 500km and destroying valuable resources is not a sustainable or efficient waste solution, it locks us into waste generation and undermines waste reduction, reuse and recycling
- Initiatives related to the “Collective Economy” leading to a better future for Parkes and maximisation of the opportunities presenting as a result of its location will be stifled.
- I’m concerned that people will move away from Parkes and we will struggle to attract new people to our town particularly in relation to healthcare and essential services.
- The community has not been properly consulted, and decisions have been made without full transparency, in fact cover-up, greenwashing and misleading could be accurately applied to information being used to promote energy from waste incineration...
- I’m concerned that Parkes is being burdened with Sydney’s waste problems. Burning waste from Sydney in Regional NSW unfairly burdens our community with Sydney’s waste and the associated environmental, health and economic risks.
- My family will move away from Parkes should the project go ahead, and I am concerned this proposal threatens tourism, property prices and investment in Parkes.

Having spent my childhood and completed my schooling in Parkes, I left to embark on a study programme (returning for a period to be involved in local retail businesses), which led to a rewarding and productive career working both in Australia and Internationally. On retirement I returned to Parkes.

I heard many references to the Parkes SAP, and thought “finally”, Parkes was about to capitalise on its rail connection to every major capital city, and was excited that finally the vision of a mayor during the ‘70s was finally coming to fruition, with the added benefit of working toward the UN objective of the beginnings of a “Collective Economy’. I began thinking of ways the community could get involved and develop a new and rewarding approach to economic development.

I was taken by surprise when I heard of the proposed EfW Incinerator and attended the Parkes Clean Future information meeting. I was impressed by both the number of attendees, and the information provided by the speakers.

Since the meeting I have informally surveyed many people from a broad spectrum of age and endeavour and have been struck by the limited knowledge of the details of the proposal, and a substantial majority who were under the impression that this lack of understanding and their preferences didn’t matter because “it is going to happen anyway”. I have been assured by local council that this is not the case, but then recently met a contractor working on the beginning of what he described as the “Parkes Power Station”.

I believe that a licence from the NSW Environmental Protection Agency to enable operation of the facility has yet to be granted and wonder how that could be entertained when the same

organisation made a blanket decision that EfW Incinerators were inappropriate for NSW as a whole. But still contractors are in town, commencing the construction of the “Parkes Power Station”.

This then suggests that the NSW Government is contemplating taking the path of least resistance to alleviate Sydney’s landfill problem, washing what information is released to the public, exaggerating the benefits to the community, and ignoring the very large problems the facility would create for the local economy, NSW economy and the health of all who live in central and western regions.

The first modelling of the health and environmental impact of the facility was recently released (with a considerable degree of uncertainty resulting from many details of the facility remaining unknown) based on weather conditions prevailing for the 19th of October, 2025. Between 14.00 and 16.30. The stack plume spread across Eugowra, then stayed concentrated over Parkes, and then streamed over Forbes and beyond. It should be noted that the Radio Observatory was not located at Parkes because of wind free days, but because the wind speed very rarely exceeded 30 k/h. This would suggest that if a 20k/h wind blew from the NW to SW, within a few hours the pollution would cover the entire Calare Electorate. In view of the \$5billion value of the regions Primary Industry activities and possible health impacts on those who generate or consume it, this must be considered unacceptable and in keeping with the EPA ban on EfW Incinerators in NSW. This especially in view of research from overseas suggesting the highest Dioxin/Furan levels in humans are related to the amount of meat consumption, where the livestock grazed on polluted ground.

In addition to no real modelling of the proposed pollution from stack emissions, the disposal of the toxic ash from the facility has received no real and meaningful discussion, except from the proposers, who trivialise the issue (to be used in concrete or road-fill). This is unlikely, and potentially problematic (removing concrete in 50 years’ time may well be equivalent to asbestos removal today, while in Europe, road base release has resulted in pollution of landscaping materials, and subsequent problems with Park use).

The largest parameter change associated with EfW is volume reduction (600,000 tonnes reduces to 150,000 tonnes of ash). This disposal of Ash issue has not been addressed by the proposer or government. To prevent the need to add 600,000 tonnes of Sydney red bin rubbish to landfill each year, the Parkes EfW Incinerator will create the same problem for Parkes every four years. The geology of Parkes results in surface and groundwater leaching into the Lachlan River via the Billabong Creak, from where it makes its way for release into the Southern Ocean at Adelaide. This implies very strict control over waterproofing the landfill, and in view of the recent algal bloom and POP issues, seems problematic to say the least.

The NSW Government information pamphlet lists four sights for EfW Incinerators as part of its “Strategic Framework for “assessing” of EfW proposals”. I note that the Richmond valley and Goulburn are no longer proposed sites. The “Rubbish Trains” have to go to Goulburn before embarking a further 310 km to Parkes. Does this make sense? Perhaps Parkes rail infrastructure would enable “Rubbish Trains” from Queensland, Victoria and South Australia, to ensure a constant supply of rubbish? Is this the most appropriate strategy for utilising the benefits of Inland Rail, when I am sure the original strategy was to remove the need for the transport of so much goods by road in a world where fuel can only become more expensive and difficult to procure, and to achieve the environmental and economic benefit of rail transport.

The same pamphlet also lists as a benefit to Parkes the attraction of “investment and economic opportunities”, which appear to be e-waste and plastic recycling, with their associated environmental and health harm potential. This will negate any investment in areas other than potential pollution generators, which then increases the impact on the health of NSW as discussed previously.

So then, the NSW Government’s own regulation states that Energy-from-Waste incinerators are not suitable for Sydney due to health and environmental risks. The NSW EPA ban on Energy-from-Waste in NSW uses the “precautionary principle” of prohibiting Energy-from-Waste “where there is a greater risk of harm to human health due to proximity to high population areas (now and in the future)”. Yet those same risks are apparently acceptable for regional towns like Parkes. The regulation is not equitable, which is not compatible with the Australian Democratic Principles of working towards a society where everyone is respected and free. Further, the washing and with-holding of facts and the generation of expectation runs counter to the concept that citizens can make changes to the society in which they live creating a better future for all. The risk thresholds are being selectively applied based on geography rather than objective health criteria. Placing such a project in Regional NSW, does not eliminate the risk, it just redirects the risk to a population perceived to be of lesser value, visibility and political power. The only consolation being that coastal NSW receives their rubbish back within the food chain, so they do not escape the health implications for the central and western districts, although they still avoid the obvious concentration within collected rain water.

Energy-from-Waste production generates toxic byproducts, including both air and ash emissions of toxic gases, heavy metals, and persistent organic pollutants (POP’s) like dioxins and furans. Some forever chemicals (PFAS) are resistant to high temperatures and are also emitted. These pollutants can travel long distances, posing a risk to human health, agriculture and the environment. Australia’s commitment to the Stockholm Convention emphasises the need to minimise such emissions. Locating an EfW Incinerator near towns, culturally significant areas and farming communities threatens not only biodiversity and soil quality but also the reputation of our regional produce. This produce is extensive in quantity and diversity, covering stone fruit, apples, grapes, meat and vegetables. If the reputation of quality is reduced, then the regions agricultural output in excess of \$5billion is at serious risk, with flow on effects of property values and farm viability etc.

Despite the significant risks, local residents were not properly consulted during the Parkes Special Activation Precinct planning in 2019, which included plans for the Energy-from-Waste incinerator, or during the NSW EPA Energy-from-Waste framework review that made Parkes exempt to the Energy-from-Waste ban in NSW. Many in Parkes first heard about the project in 2025 after key decisions had already been made. The process has lacked transparency, community involvement, and respect for social license. In fact, both the SAP and EPA web sight contain graphs comparing stack emission pollutants to wood fires, truck exhausts and leaf blower exhausts. This is included to create the impression of less pollution issues from the stack. This is grossly unscientific, as comparison of gas contents should always use Normal gas volumes to remove any temperature effect on volume for realistic comparison, and no data exists for the volume of stack emissions (stack emissions of say 5000 m³ /hr will deliver far more total pollutants to the environment than a 70cc leaf blower operating for 20min per fortnight in the summer). Further, as discussed earlier, the generation of “done deal” sentiment, stopped a large part of the population from learning the facts, entering the discussion or participating in community feedback or input.

The NSW EPA seeks to “maximise efficiencies in infrastructure, waste management, innovation and energy recovery”. Yet Energy-from-Waste is banned in Sydney and designated appropriate in Parkes, over 500km by rail from the intended fuel source. This is not efficient waste management due to unnecessary transportation costs and emissions and would not be considered for the development of coal fired electricity generation.

Waste contracts can also change in the future. Is it an appropriate use of the inland rail network to meet these contractual obligations?

Thermal EfW production is not an efficient or renewable method of electricity production when using finite resources as fuel (like plastic which is made from coal, natural gas and crude oil). Compared to other energy sources, waste incineration yields relatively low energy output while emitting higher levels of greenhouse gases, undermining efforts to combat climate change. The electricity that will be created by the project is being promoted as powering 80,000 homes each year, however, the energy created will not be used to power one single home, it will be used in the Special Activation Precinct to attract other 'hard-to-place' polluting industry as discussed above.

Finally, the facility is being promoted as providing only 50 long term jobs (perhaps 30?) for our community, while a survey conducted by the Parkes Clean Future Alliance determined that 54 farmers, 42 healthcare workers, and 32 educators will take the precautionary step of moving away from Parkes if the proposed Energy-from-Waste incinerator is approved. Projections of those deterred by the EfW incinerator from moving to the area can only be projected as closer to 100%, and include Police, Fire and freight, the whole strategy of Inland Rail.

Lets start thinking about the original Collective Economy originally proposed by Mayor Robert Wilson, which started the discussion with respect Inland Rail over 50 years ago. Produce from all over the Parkes agricultural area could be harvested and freighted to Parkes within 24 hours or less. This could be loaded onto freight planes operating on an extended existing runway that could then have the fresh produce in the Northern Hemisphere in its winter months dominated by cold and snow within 24 hours. The precinct then used to attract processing plants and organic production facilities to increase the range of product to supply the complete market demand for this product during Australian production months, coinciding with Northern Hemisphere non-productive months. Establish part of the precinct area for bulk produce markets driven by community support for local consumption and thus achieve a large step toward a no waste economy. Instead of creating a potential problem sometime in the ensuing decades, lets put our minds to removing risk and adjusting peoples attitudes toward People have a voice and can make changes in society so that:

- People can participate by getting involved in their community. This might be by joining a charity or a community group.
- Everyone can get involved
- People work towards a society where everyone is respected and free, where everyone is valued and supported to reach their full potential.
- A community that supports the development and well-being of individuals and their right to make their own choices.

In anticipation of the opportunity for further discussion and input,

David Ward