

Submission  
No 790

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE  
FACILITIES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I am writing to you about the Woodlawn Advanced Energy Recovery Centre that is being proposed as a NSW State Significant Project to be built in the Woodlawn Precinct, near Tarago NSW. Fancy words will not change what it is; it is an incinerator to burn rubbish. Nothing more, nothing less. After experiencing the force of the wind in the 2020 summer, and the bush fire smoke that came with it, I have real concerns for my own health as well as that of my family and the surrounding communities from this incinerator.

It feels like there is almost silence on the communities fight to stop this. Even the local NSW Parliament member was called out on her hypocrisy for fighting against a Southern Highlands Plastic Recycling Plant, but not doing the same for a Waste Incinerator being planned in the same electorate, by Robert Borsak, MLC, member of the Shooters Fishers Farmers Party.

### ***Who is affected?***

This project is causing local communities significant anxiety.

- The Tarago community and surrounding agricultural and rural residential communities are against this project.
- Both relevant councils — Goulburn-Mulwaree and Queanbeyan-Palerang — are against this project.
- NSW Parliamentary representatives — Wendy Tuckerman MP (Goulburn) and Nichole Overall MLC — have said they are against this project. The Fishers and Shooters Party are against this project.

The plume from the incinerator is also likely to reach and affect people in the ACT (see (<https://www.notaragoincinerator.com/plume-plotter>)). The ACT Government has already banned waste incineration due to health concerns and community backlash when a similar proposal was put before them. It is a Human Right to have healthy air in the ACT (ACT Government (2025)). As no-one can control the air, how will the NSW Government and Veolia stop polluted air crossing the border?

The residents locally here, particularly in Tarago are already affected by the waste sent by train from Sydney to the Woodlawn precinct. Just because it has been coming here for years doesn't mean a waste incinerator is the answer or that the waste should even come here still.

### ***What are the problems?***

The NSW Government (both Liberal and subsequent Labor Governments) sees this incinerator as a great project, in fact State Significant. They have said that ‘energy from waste is an emerging technology in Australia and involves the thermal treatment of waste or waste-derived materials for the recovery of energy’ (NSW Government, n.d.).

This incinerator is not an emerging technology. It is not even a new technology. This incinerator will be burning rubbish that contains plastics and other toxic materials including commercial waste for at least 30 years. It will be burning 24 hours, 7 days a week for 30 years. Burning rubbish has been banned in Australian backyards for decades. Europeans have been burning waste in incinerators for decades. It is not new. But the Europeans are now moving away from burning waste as it creates dangerous dioxins and contaminates the region around it. It also creates toxic ash that needs to be stored in concrete bunkers. Veolia is now amending their application (About Regional, 2024) saying they can store the waste ash in the bioreactor, which goes against best practice and with many environmental breaches with the bioreactor this is highly concerning. In February this year the Braidwood Bugle reported that Veolia was fined \$30,000 for a licence breach at the Woodlawn Operations (Braidwood Bugle, 2025 & EPA, 2024).

Why are governments in Australia starting to build waste incinerators if Europe is moving away from them? We need to be cutting edge and not looking for a quick fix solution (ABC News, 10/10/2021). Burning rubbish in the UK is a dirtier way to generate electricity and equates to how dirty it is to burn coal (BBC, 2024).

The people who oppose this incinerator — individuals and communities — are up against a big multinational corporation that is hell bent on building this facility (as well as their own government). Veolia state they will be ‘... creating jobs, support regional communities and generate energy’ (Veolia, 2022). But really they are a company and the focus of any company is to make a profit. This aim should not be at the expense of these communities’ health and livelihood (The District Bulletin, 15/2/2022). Veolia have already had numerous environmental breaches in Australia, why risk another possibly worse one (see <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news/media-releases/2021/epamedia210723-epa-fines-veolia-environmental-services-for-waste-offence> and <https://apps.epa.nsw.gov.au/prpoeoapp/ViewPOEONotice.aspx?DOCID=-1&SYSUID=1&LICID=3503885> for only a few of the EPA Breaches).

The Tarago residents have created a not-for-profit association *Communities Against the Tarago Incinerator (CATTI) Inc* to combat the waste incinerator project. They have scant funds and minimal time. They are up against a multinational corporation who is gaslighting them — a resident’s words in their Facebook group — and stopping them from finding out critical information in their fight for a safe and toxic-free region. Veolia has already breached its operating conditions and residents have filed complaints about the smell from their current bioreactor landfill operation. Veolia is now blocking residents from seeing documentation, which shows when and how many times these

breeches have occurred (The Canberra Times, 19 June 2022). How much faith can the community have that this company is safely able to operate a facility that has significantly higher health risks (Science Diet, September 2020) — cancer a major one — than what they are currently operating? The Tarago group had a zoom meeting with former members of a community consultative committee in Sheffield where there is a similar energy from waste incinerator run by Veolia. In this meeting the Sheffield participants mentioned that ‘... the Veolia manager of the plant admitted that there had been breaches of compliance when the wrong materials were burnt and there had been toxic gasses emitted’ (pers. comm., 5 May 2022).

Veolia cannot guarantee that there will be no leakage or contamination in our region from this incinerator. Conditions of operation set by the EPA are not tough enough, particularly when nothing has been done about the horrendous smell coming from Veolia’s current bioreactor landfill operations — a fine and a fix notice doesn’t amend any breach that has occurred. The fumes will travel far, what can we expect with toxic pollution coming from this incinerator. Will we not be able to eat our produce, drink our water, be on our farms like residents in France who can’t eat eggs (Euro News, 2023).

The stench in Tarago from the waste that is sent by train from Sydney to the bioreactor landfill operations is significant. Odours linger for hours, even days. Just driving through is an assault to the senses. The smell even travels across Weereewa (Lake George) to Gundaroo (information from a residents local Facebook group). People who live on the other side of Weereewa from the Woodlawn Precinct regularly smell the bioreactor landfill (our friends). On speaking to them they didn’t know they can write a complaint about this, why were they not informed that they could, or if there has ever been any testing and study into the distance the smell from the current operations can travel.

Treatment of past contamination issues does not augur well for the future. Tarago residents are already dealing with lead contamination from the Woodlawn mine near Tarago. Many areas along the rail corridor from the mine are contaminated with lead, including the Tarago public school, several private residences and a number of household water tanks. Transport for NSW did not inform residents for nearly five years of this contamination (ABC News, 16/3/2020). Similarly in 2021 Bungendore was found to have lead-contaminated land along the rail corridor from the lead mine in Captains Flat that closed in 1962. This has resulted in fenced off areas and the Bungendore Men’s Shed could not use the old wool storage shed as a meeting place (Transport for NSW, 2022). Why did it take so long to tell residents of the toxic and harmful lead in these locations? Why did it take so long to test for its presence? How soon and ongoing would testing for leakage or contamination from the proposed waste incinerator be done and when would the community be informed about this by relevant authorities? How far will they test for the contamination from this waste incinerator? People in the Blue Mountains who have PFAS contaminated water were in the dark and are asking for testing, a class action being suggested (ABC News, February and March 2025), it doesn’t bode well for them and an incinerator won’t bode well for any locality near one.

The proposed incinerator sits within the Sydney drinking water catchment. It sits exceptionally close to Bungendore's water supply — Weereewa (Lake George). Surrounding rural residents mainly use rainwater from roofs for drinking, washing and often for watering plants including fruit trees and vegetable gardens. Water NSW has said that the development must 'provide a clear description and justification as to how the development would achieve a neutral or beneficial effect on water quality' (Water NSW, 20/6/2021).

Not only is the whole issue of waste incineration of concern, but Veolia and the NSW Government are proposing to build this waste incineration facility in a high wind area — an area where the plume can spread further. The existing wind farm between Bungendore and Tarago is so successful that they are looking at increasing the number of wind turbines (NSW Planning Portals Major Projects, 2022).

### ***What is the solution?***

It is planned that the proposed incinerator would run for 30 years. It is being touted as a great solution to the Sydney waste problem. This is greenwashing at its best. It is not a good environmental solution at all.

This infrastructure will not help reduce emissions and will produce toxic waste. A reduction of landfill emissions only occurs when organic waste is burned, but that can be composted which is more sustainable and safer than burning (Zero Waste Europe, 26/5/2021). **Waste incinerators contribute to climate change by emitting CO<sup>2</sup> amongst reducing jobs and recycling of resources.** (GAIA, 2018)

A better solution would be to not create plastic waste in the first place. This is particularly important now the soft plastics recycling chain has broken down ([https://www.smh.com.au/national/coles-woolworths-recycling-scheme-collapses-after-secret-stockpiles-revealed-20221107-p5bw9q.html?fbclid=IwAR0B9-rWzLRTxfh5U0PwTi7roJaoCB4GC7LyDf\\_2\\_12W4jpXrZcOpYxZTiU](https://www.smh.com.au/national/coles-woolworths-recycling-scheme-collapses-after-secret-stockpiles-revealed-20221107-p5bw9q.html?fbclid=IwAR0B9-rWzLRTxfh5U0PwTi7roJaoCB4GC7LyDf_2_12W4jpXrZcOpYxZTiU)).

Whilst the NSW Government (NSW EPA, 2025) (and many other governments) have single use plastic bans, they are not capturing all single use plastics. Buying boardgames, tea towels, many food items in supermarkets, hardware, tools and clothing, to name a few, they all have soft plastics or small plastics which can't be recycled. The government is not doing enough and not making manufacturers make better choices by not producing these plastics or excessive packaging. Many of these plastics can be replaced with other materials that are recyclable. For example, some manufacturers and clothing stores use cotton to attach a swing tag and cardboard instead of small un-recyclable plastic hooks on small item hanging tags. Some bread manufacturers are making bread tags out of cardboard instead of plastic. Some are even selling bread in paper bags not plastic. If they can do this why can't other clothing manufacturers, stores and food producers do this. Do we really need small fish with sauces at sushi stores? Fruit can have an edible printed label to identify them for purchase instead of the small plastic sticker, or even a paper sticker with biodegradable sticking component.

Manufacturers have the capacity to make the necessary changes. An example is that smarties now come in a paper bag, and Cadbury is slowly transitioning to recyclable packaging, but it is taking time.

Other chocolate bars could be sold wrapped in foil and paper that can be recycled, like it used to be sold. LEGO is slowly moving to stop the plastic bags their components come in, IKEA has made some changes (but not enough). Packaging that can be re-used is essential. Bulk food stores where you take your own packaging are one answer, Deli's with produce where you can take your own container. We can do this at our local IGA, but not all types of cheese can be bought this way. A few butcher's we go to will use our container we bring for our purchase. It is possible and can be done to reduce the waste.

This is not all, so many products, appliances and equipment is not able to be repaired and has obsolescence inbuilt. It means it has to get thrown out not fixed. We are not doing enough in this country with legislation to enforce manufacturers and businesses to make change.

### ***What will happen to Sydney's rubbish if the incinerator is not built?***

Sydney creates a lot of waste. If they really want an incinerator, the NSW Government should look at building this incinerator IN Sydney where the waste is coming from rather than pandering to the Sydney attitude of out of sight out of mind. But Sydney residents don't want a waste incinerator built there, and as there is a higher density of population it appears neither does the NSW Government, except possibly for people from Western Sydney (ABC News, 7/2/2022). If it is not safe for the residents in Sydney (The Guardian, 2018) (The Sydney morning Herald, 10/4/22), why is it safe for rural residents — should I also say and maybe the marginalised Western Sydney residents?

The NSW Government has even said it is satisfactory to build such incinerators in rural areas. They say they should be located 'away from high-density residential areas' near Bathurst, Lithgow, Casino and Queanbeyan..." (ABC News, 7/2/2022). So instead they will build it in an area where people farm (livestock, eggs, vegetable and fruit) and use rainwater tanks for drinking water, washing and irrigating?! Waste incineration is not safe — my health, our communities' health, is as important as the health of residents in high-density residential areas.

Sydney residents need to be mindful of their waste, do more composting, more recycling, and reduce the waste. Make businesses that produce the waste in their packaging do better by telling them they will send the packaging back to them to recycle and deal with. Buy less, be discerning with what they buy. Overall we need to create less waste in the first place. It is possible. We are constantly assessing what we buy and the packaging to reduce our waste further. But as manufacturers are not making changes we can't avoid the soft plastics with purchases of some cheese, films over sauce bottles and other ways they seal items. While some businesses are starting to change it needs to be all businesses, and governments making legislation to enforce the change, it needs to start now. We are already living in a world with significant climate change with floods, bush fires and extreme weather conditions. Burning rubbish in a waste incinerator in Tarago — or anywhere in Australia — is not an extra burden we need and it will contribute to CO<sup>2</sup> as referenced earlier.

We have had recycling in this country for my whole life and longer. I remember in the late 1970s our glass bottles were recycled, as were steel and aluminium cans, paper and cardboard. The plastics are the biggest issue. The soft plastics and the plastics too small to go into the recycling system, these need to stop being manufactured and used.

We have had significant education in our Australian Schools with AuSSI (Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative), and now Sustainability embedded into the curriculum as a cross-curriculum priority. This means every school subject can find an aspect of sustainability, which they can teach in the classroom. I was one of the trained teachers to be a Sustainable Schools Officer in the high school where I taught, even being awarded a Highly Commended Individual Award in the Education Section of the ACT 2007 No Waste Awards. Our young people want change, they want climate action and they want sustainability, as they have been learning this explicitly for at least over 20 years. They do not want to be left with an environmental disaster (World Health Organisation, 2021). What I am reading in the news concerns me, that society and government action is going backwards not forwards, we need to protect the environment, so we have a healthy and safe place to live. If we don't then what will we do? Many governments around the world want their populations to expand with birth rates, but why would you have a child if it is not a safe environment to raise them? (Australian Government Centre for Population, 2022).

If the company planning for the waste incinerator has also won the contract for the recycling in the ACT, how much of that will be recycled and not diverted to the waste incinerator?! If they can organise the recycling, why are they proposing a waste incinerator?

### ***Where to next?***

I have given you information about why incinerators are not the answer but you might like to read more about it too. I have references below and the CATTI Inc has a long list of references as to why it should not be built (<https://www.notaragoincinerator.com/research>). Any organisation, government, lobbyist, consultant or researcher etc... who labels a community opposing a waste incinerator as NIMBY (not in my backyard), needs to have a close look at themselves as I doubt any of them would want a waste incinerator near their home/work/childcare centre/playground/school/shops/food production/etc...

Waste incinerators—Energy from Waste or whatever the name they are choosing to use—should not be built ANYWHERE in Australia. Building a waste incinerator in my region amounts to an experiment without consent. I do not want to take a risk that my land, my health, and my community's health and wellbeing will be compromised if there is an escape of toxins. For it to be built and see if it will be safe when '... the risks were just too great ... There were no adequate guarantees to ensure the health and safety of people in Western Sydney' (The Guardian, 2018), is stupid and wilfully negligent. Note: even though the Western Sydney waste incinerator appeared to have been stopped, it seems to be back on the agenda (NSW Government, 2022). Communities should not have to take continued action to safeguard their health and wellbeing against waste incinerator projects and multinational

corporations (also their own government) who do not have their best interests at heart. Waste incineration should be banned. Nothing that Veolia can say and document can assure it will be 100% safe; no amount of research will say it is 100% safe. We have already have massive issues in Australia with asbestos, thalidomide, PFAS and silicosis. Don't make waste incineration the cause of the next medical disaster in this country.

Put people before profits. Decisions are being made that affect our community by people who don't live here and will not be affected by this. Governments should be supporting their communities to ensure we have a safe and healthy environment, taking action to protect the environment for generations to come. It is a class action is the making.

We have an amazing country let's not destroy any more than we already have. Please ban any incinerator — Advanced Energy Recover Facility, or what ever name they choose, that will burn waste in Tarago, and other regions in NSW and Australia. Stop it before it is built.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your reply, hoping there is something you can do to assist our community to stop waste incinerators being built.

Yours Faithfully

28th October 2025

### **Reading list**

More research can be found on the *Communities Against The Tarago Incinerator* website <https://www.notaragoincinerator.com/research>

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