

Submission
No 811

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE
FACILITIES**

Name: Mr Jacob Unger
Date Received: 31 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

Jacob William Unger

To the Select Committee on Proposed Energy from Waste Facilities,

I am a local resident of the Parkes Shire in the Central West of NSW. I live in Peak Hill, about 50 kilometres North from the centre of Parkes. I have lived within the Parkes Shire for majority of my life and at this stage of life, intend to stay for a few more years yet. I am also married, and have one daughter who resides in Parkes 8 days a fortnight and 6 days in Peak Hill with my wife and I.

The reasons for my submission centre around consultation (lack thereof), human health (mental and physical), environmental, industry, agriculture, energy (renewable and sustainable), waste management, cultural heritage (indigenous and modern), greenwashing (refer to the Federal inquiry on Greenwashing 2025), community discourse and Local Government distrust (specifically Parkes Shire Council), censorship and blocking in Social Media forums, and long-term liveability in affected communities.

The **consultation** process around Energy from Waste (to be referred to as EfW throughout) has been murky at best, underhanded and deceitful at worst. Going back through documents and posts from the Parkes Shire Council Facebook page, the first obvious reference to EfW being utilised in Parkes was in September 2021. A post was shared which explained, in low detail, EfW and the intent to attempt to bring the industry to Parkes. This post received less than 10 reactions (likes) and 1 comment from a member of the public posing a correction to the text shown. Another post in August 2022 outlined the NSW governments shortlisting of three (3) groups to submit proposals to deliver an EfW facility as part of the Parkes Special Activation Precinct's (SAP) circular economy. It stated "This is the first step in an energy from waste facility coming to Parkes.". This post attracted a mere 6 reactions, and the PSC Facebook page tagged the Parkes Champion Post and The Parkes Phoenix. Apart from these 2 posts in the very early stage, the consultation to residents has been lack-lustre, up until the 24th of March this year. This was the day that particularly stands out as one of poor timing, and a complete disregard for the low engagement the PSC Facebook page had received to this point. It highlighted the neglect of the community as a whole in the consultation process, one that was also overlooked quite largely by the state government as well. It is of my opinion that consultation was the last step in a drawn-out process, due to previous proposals being successfully pushed back on in larger centres, including Matraville and the Federal Minister for Energy's, Chris Bowen, seat of McMahon (Eastern Creek). The general pushback by communities, especially around human health and the environment are apparent and clear.

Human health is one of modern societies greatest challenges, even with the constant and ever-increasing improvement in Medicine and Science. Since the initial major consultation on the 24th of March, the mental health of shire residents has been continuously affected by the lack of credible information and government transparency. Many people have said they would leave town if the incinerator is built. This poses a serious risk to ongoing and future health concerns, as amongst the large group who responded to a survey from the Parkes were health professionals. Doctors and nurses who hold health as their highest priority believe that an incinerator would be detrimental to the town, to the point that they would no longer live in the region. The strain on health would be irreversible if this industry was thrust upon residents, unwilling or not. The risk from persistent

organic pollutants (POPs) will affect humans generationally as well, as these compounds build up (bioaccumulate) within the body and have been known to cause cancer, endocrine issues and developmental problems. Under the Stockholm Convention, the treaty states that parties must reduce or eliminate the production of POPs. As such, incineration is fundamentally against the ideals of this treaty and should be outlawed altogether.

The **environment** is highly susceptible to the effects of emissions and with the currently contentious issue of the federal government set on Net Zero, the incineration of plastics and other red-bin waste will release large amounts of carbon dioxide, sulfur oxide, carbon monoxide, dioxins, furans, heavy metals (mercury, lead) and PFAS. A process known as De Novo Synthesis, which allows for reformation of certain molecules during the incineration process, in between furnace destruction and cooling in the exhaust portion, occurs when the spent fuel (fly ash) is only burnt to 750-900°C and cooling takes over 2 seconds to reach below 250°C. This is proven and widely known, but seems to be a low concern of the proponents and the NSW Government. The flow-on effects of the dispersion of these particulates will be seen all the way to Murray Bridge, as the main watershed of Parkes flows into the Lachlan, eventually reaching the Murray River. This covers a significantly large area of the state, which is then used in agriculture for irrigation, as well as drinking water throughout the regions reliant on river and bore water. This would be devastating over the long-term to flora, fauna and human health. As majority of Australians care about the environment, being heavily dependent on the whims of mother nature, we want to see real action from government and manufacturers to assist in the reduction of waste, including a complete phase out of single-use plastics and the introduction of manufacturer plastic-life responsibility. This would obligate single-use plastic producers to also be responsible for the disposal and destruction of the materials they manufacture. Implications of this would be heavy penalties and the onus to remove the waste from the waste stream, reducing the cost to consumers and taxpayers. This would also minimise the landfill requirements, taking more strain off the land needed for safe disposal of non-usable waste. The environment, particularly protection of, should be our top priority, as without a healthy environment, we cannot survive and thrive.

I see the SAP at Parkes as an opportunity for the region to play host to interesting and beneficial **industries**, putting Parkes Shire on the map as a hub of excellence, of high standards, educational expertise, and employment fortitude. With the exception of an EfW incinerator, the list is long of ideal industries that could be integral to the fabric of the community, including grain and meat processing, warehousing, commerce, research and development, manufacturing and material production. I expressed such to the mayor of Parkes during a brief conversation at this year's Parkes Show, and they were receptive of this idea and agreed that the opportunities are endless. If marketed correctly and the wider region is content with the business aims and care of community, social licence can be granted to suitable businesses.

Agriculture is the cornerstone of the Central West, with many families either living on farms, related to farmers or reliant on farming, associated employment and many enterprises this encompasses. As many others, especially farming families, have pointed out, the threat of incineration to safe food production is high on the list of concern. I myself am descended from a well know farming family who has resided continually in the Parkes district since 1911. Our past should be a reflection of our future, with the focus put on leaving the land in a better state than you started with. Our forefathers knew this, and continually attempted to improve practises to increase productivity and maximise output from the land. During the last 6 months, there has been a few comments made, in papers and on radio, comparing the practice of stubble burning to incineration, and while the basic premise is the same, the inputs (stubble vs red bin waste) and outputs (emissions) are not even close to the

same. Stubble burning, whilst in my opinion is more or less unnecessary, predominantly uses cereal crop stalks as the primary fuel source, which releases stored carbon and, by extension, carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and very little other emissions. **Incineration**, as I touched on earlier, releases dangerous compounds not found naturally in the environment and, where research has been limited due to the modernity of the use of plastic in society, is persistent in the human body, water sources, soil and air, as well as other animals and plants. As Australia is built on the back of agriculture, cereal cropping, sheep and cattle production, this concern of contaminated food is quite reasonable and should be scrutinised comprehensively by all sides of the argument. Our state, and indeed our country, requires the highest quality, contamination-free food to ensure future generations are the healthiest in the world. If the emissions can not be guaranteed safe, then the government must back our farmers and agriculture industry and **enforce compensation to all affected parties, including town residents, “..on just terms” as provided for under s.51 of the Australian Constitution.**

The **energy** section encompasses many facets, but mainly the greenwashing term comparing the energy production from the Parkes EfW proposal to “power 80,000 homes, businesses and industry in the SAP”. Where the issue lies is that the power was never planned to leave the SAP and is slated to be wholly used by the SAP and such misinformation has caused many in the community to believe that power will be sold directly to them cheaper than current rates. As Parkes already has 2 solar farms, with a 3rd currently being constructed along with a BESS facility, the requirement for more power is negligible at best, as the town and surrounds would only have 10,000 homes to provide electricity. As I see it, the power production of facilities is an excuse for the primary purpose of incineration of the residual waste from Greater Sydney and surrounds. Legislation must be introduced to outlaw any incineration of red-bin waste, residual and municipal solid wastes, at minimum in NSW, but also, if possible, Australia. There needs to be a **moratorium** introduced to stop any and all proposals, developments or construction of Energy from Waste projects until such a point where proper research and consultation to NSW residents has been conducted and a general consensus is reached for approval and social licence provided.

In terms of **waste management**, the state and local governments have been slow to inform and educate constituents of changes in waste disposal practises, included what to put into green FOGO bins (most do not accept compostable or biodegradable bags), where to dispose of small batteries and what should and shouldn't be placed into general (red bin) waste receptacles. To truly reach a circular economy, the governments at all levels need to set the standard for culture change, to encourage a proactive outlook on waste, what we throw away, what we can reuse and what can be composted. The reliance on plastic within our society has seen some the worst practises and environmental disasters unfold right before us. A report from 2017 states that people consume over 400 microplastic particles a year from bottled water alone, with 28.3% of the population drinking bottled water. “Microplastics can cause inflammation, oxidative stress, and genotoxicity in human cells, and have been linked to a range of potential health issues including cardiovascular disease, lung and other cancers, fertility problems, and neurological and metabolic disorders. They can accumulate in organs like the heart, brain, and reproductive organs, and may carry and release toxic chemicals into the body”. Incineration will increase this risk on exposed communities and by extension increases the disparity of the health of regional NSW and large city areas. If levies were introduced to incentivise consumers to reduce their waste volumes, such as a charge dependent on how often your red bin is emptied and the net weight overall, may shift thinking and assist in the lowering of general waste rates and see greater emphasis put on recycling and composting.

Having grown up in a large Aboriginal population community, I have seen the challenges consistently faced by our indigenous brothers and sisters and understand the necessity of **cultural heritage protection**. Our responsibility to preserving the rights and practises of aboriginals, which spans back further than 10,000 years ago in this area, is paramount to successful outcomes for the regions, especially in terms of land management, environmental protection and continued transfer of knowledge, not only for the Wiradjuri peoples, but also for modern farming practises and Australian cultural identity. The songlines for indigenous populations run far and deep across our shire, and the state (Wiradjuri being the largest language group by area size in NSW), from the Northern flowing Bogan River (10-15 kms north of Parkes), the Western flowing Lachlan River (Cowra, Forbes, Condobolin) and the Herveys (Harvey) Range just East of Parkes and Peak Hill. The aboriginals of the area are proud, intelligent, skilled and important members of our society and to be overlooked during any consultation is nothing short of offensive and disrespectful to the history of their ancestry. During my many talks with members and Traditional Owners from the Peak Hill Local Aboriginal Lands Council, they have expressed their disdain for poor communication, tokenistic gestures and lack of acknowledgement. **If the EIS from any proposal does not include Traditional Owner input then the project should be scrapped immediately, until such time where due process has been followed, approval given for works to be developed, and investment into cultural heritage improvement programs are utilised on a sliding scale based on the total cost of the project.**

Greenwashing, which is currently under scrutiny in the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry – Greenwashing 2025, has been a constant throughout the process from the proponents with claims such as a leaf blower (2 stroke) is more polluting than an EfW incinerator, by a factor of 20. Another claim being touted is that the emissions are no worse than a road train rolling down the highway from Brisbane to Melbourne, or that it produces less particulates than around 200 cars per day. Statements that seek to downplay the severity or actual output values of such technology confuse and misinform residents, as has been seen with certain people writing that the facilities are “fully sealed”, “closed-loop” and only release “a small amount of steam”. We are consistently bombarded with half-truths and misinformation that would otherwise be illegal in certain industries and public domains. Yet the proponents continually state that the public themselves perpetuate “misinformation” and incite fear and scaremongering tactics throughout the process. In an age where information is a click away and fact checking takes less time than opening a book, the pure gall of any industry proponent to lie, misinform and deceive is laughable, but downright unethical. I call on the NSW government to implement any and all recommendations that arise from the Federal Inquiry into greenwashing, and also would **suggest that the NSW Parliament conduct their own inquiry into greenwashing practices across the board.**

Along the way of this terrible, misguided process, community standing of the local governments have been called into question, specifically for openness, transparency and fair representation by councillors. While I appreciate the unenviable task of being an elected official and maintaining a high level of open-mindedness when it comes to matters of significant financial opportunity, the treatment of the wider public by a few councillors has been deplorable, with some even stooping to writing in their personal, public blogs to vent their frustrations to anyone who would be ignorant enough to believe. This shows the lack of awareness of the role of council, and individual councillors, to their constituents. Whilst prior to the announcement of the proposal at Parkes, the general feeling towards Parkes Shire Council was one of apathy, mixed with uncertainty, this has deteriorated into distrust, anxiety and, in some cases, anger. On the whole, the community feels used and cast out, when a simple show of acknowledgement and care could have assisted with the unease and dread. I am hopeful that the proposed changes to Local Government put forward by the Minns government will allow for more open dialogue with council and the residents of the area they represent,

including, but not limited to, greater access to council meetings, better sound and picture quality of council live-stream meetings, and the ability to lobby individual councillors as required.

On the subject of accessibility, this process has shown that censorship and blocking of public information, people and comments is rife in all facets of social media. The ability to get community information out and about is highly limited by individual administrators of pages that promote themselves as “noticeboards”, “community groups” and “bulletin boards”. We are consistently seeing the censorship of pertinent information throughout consultation processes, as well as just in local groups such as Landcare and Chamber of Commerce. There needs to be action taken around the limitation of communication for certain groups and ideals to allow for greater transparency and accountability of these organisations. Whilst this does not apply directly to the inquiry, I would be remiss if I did not raise the issue.

My final concern is in relation to long-term liveability in an area affected by EfW emissions, the negative regional stigma attached to produce from the region if contaminated, and lowered land values from all the previous noted issues. We have clean air, clean water and clean soil, take any one of those things away and we might as well pack up and head to the coast with the other 90% of Australians. We all love our backyard, our hometowns and families, and we deserve to be granted the same rights as anyone else in the state and country. We want our voices heard, and implore the NSW government to abandon EfW as any solution to the waste issues arising in the larger centres. It is a linear model, which lowers recycling rates, increases health risks and makes us feel like second-class citizens. The majority of regions faced with EfW will continue to oppose these disastrous proposals and utilize the intelligence of the people that live there to scrutinise and question the safety, motives and ethics of the proponents of these projects. The people of small towns are proud of their history, their ancestors and their contributions to a better society. We are the approvers of any and all that seek to profit from putting us at risk, and we reserve that right to this inquiry.

I strongly, unequivocally oppose any and all EfW facilities in NSW, and Australia. I call for an investigation into dealings within Parkes Shire Council and the SAP to ICAC. I also call for referral of the Parkes proposed EfW Facility to the IPC as a matter of utmost urgency. I implore the NSW government to place a moratorium on all EfW facilities immediately until the end of this Parliamentary Inquiry.

Sincerely,

Jacob Unger,

PCFA Committee Member, Father, Husband, and Son