

Submission
No 848

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE
FACILITIES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 23 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

RE: Parkes Waste to Energy Development

I am writing to raise concerns about the proposed waste incinerator in Parkes, due to the high risks of pollution from dioxins, heavy metals, and contamination of soil, water, and agricultural produce in our region, as well as the potential impact on professionals and families leaving our community (TOR d, e, j). Besides being a mature student of Environmental Sustainability, I am a resident of the small village of Trundle, about 50 km from Parkes, where my family runs a mixed farming business. We also own a rental property in Parkes, currently occupied by a family of two professionals. Our property features several dams and waterways, along with water tanks for drinking water, as there is no public water supply. Research from around the world shows a clear negative impact of similar incinerators on agricultural produce through soil and water contamination, and an increase of toxins in drinking water and food, leading to serious, irreversible harm to human health and the environment.

Health and Environmental Concerns

Numerous studies from various countries on waste incineration demonstrate that burning waste is detrimental to the environment and human health, despite the use of modern technologies and regulations. In fact, the Public Health Association of Australia released a *Waste incineration policy position statement*, outlining that incineration should not occur near places of agricultural production. Dioxins are organic compounds such as dibenzo -p - dioxins (PCDD) and dibenzofurans (PCDF) that are produced during combustion and other industrial processes (Llobet et al., 2003). Dioxins travel up the food chain when the animals consume contaminated plants (WHO, 2024). The highest concentration of dioxins is usually stored in the fat of animal products, such as meat, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products, followed by cereals, fruits and vegetables (WHO, 2024). These chemicals are highly toxic and are considered carcinogenic, entering the human body through the consumption of animal products with high fat content.

I am concerned about the negative impact on Parkes Shire's agricultural sector in the long term and the sustainability of agriculture in our region. Although the development of the waste-to-energy facility is local, the environmental and health issues will go beyond the Parkes area, as agricultural commodities are exported to all parts of the country and overseas. Without the requirement for 24/7 monitoring of emissions and biomonitoring, there is no assurance that our food supply will be protected from contamination.

Moreover, depending on the type of waste, incineration of some industrial products such as health-care waste, building materials, or even poorly separated waste (electronics, batteries, etc) can result in toxic levels of heavy metals such as mercury, cadmium, and arsenic in the fly ash (Valizadeh et al., 2024). These metals and other carcinogenic compounds from waste incinerators will likely pollute the environment. Likewise, the bottom ash that contains large concentrations of heavy metals may be transferred to soils, waterways and subsequently our food (Valizadeh et al., 2024). Lastly, the bottom ash requires landfill disposal with a risk of chemical leaching into the groundwater, resulting in irreversible environmental damage.

Principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

I am concerned that the development does not meet the principle of ecologically sustainable development, which includes the precautionary principle and inter-generational equity.

Clause 193 of the *Environmental and Planning Regulation 2021 (NSW)* describes the principles of ecologically sustainable development as follows:

- The precautionary principle – if there are threats of serious irreversible environmental damage even without full scientific certainty, the precautionary principle should be used to avoid the damage.
- Inter-generational equity – the present generation should ensure health, diversity and productivity of the environment for the benefit of future generations.
- Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity
- Polluter pays – those who generate pollution and waste should bear the cost of containment.

The goal of ESD is to take into consideration environmental protection when making development decisions, especially to balance the irreversible damage (cost) against the economic benefit.

Sustainable Waste Management (TOR i)

Among others, the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy (EPA, 2025) outlines some of the targets of reducing waste and transitioning to a circular economy by 2030:

- ✓ an 80% recovery rate of all waste
- ✓ halving the organic waste sent to landfill
- ✓ triple the plastics recycling rates.

The strategy outlines the steps needed to achieve a circular economy and reduce waste via the reduce-reuse-recycle strategy. The incinerator would diminish the need for waste reduction and serve as a setback to sustainable waste management. (TOR i)

Regional Equity and Decline

Incineration is prohibited in ACT and the rest of NSW, apart from regional areas. People from the Parkes Shire Council are no less valuable than the residents of Sydney. Regional populations deserve to be protected by the same regulations and safe investments as people from Sydney. Our geographical location with a smaller number of residents should not be the defining factor in the decision-making process.

Lastly, I am concerned that the incinerator project will result in many professionals leaving the area, including doctors, nurses and teachers (Khuc et al., 2022). Our region is already struggling to attract and maintain staff. Likewise, many farmers are considering leaving if the incinerator project is approved due to the contamination concerns. All of us living in the area and with rental properties in Parkes will be affected by the loss of professionals, not only financially but also on a personal level.

Based on the facts I have presented to you today, I urge the government to reconsider the development of the 'waste to energy' facility in Parkes, to safeguard our agricultural lands, waterways and food production in the area, as well as our health and clean future for our future generations. I advocate for safer, alternative ways for waste management, such as focusing on waste reduction, recycling and manufacturers' responsibility to prevent possible irreversible damage to our region, but also to the whole of NSW. Lastly, I appeal to you to consider the unequal treatment of our regional communities compared to Sydney.

Sincerely

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