

Submission
No 895

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE
FACILITIES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 29 October 2025

Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into proposed energy from waste facilities

I am strongly opposed to the use of 'energy from waste' incineration in NSW. My concerns are as follows:

A) Agriculture and health

My partner and I moved to a property outside Tarago approximately 4.5 years ago. I had been very ill, and we were seeking life outside the city which might afford me the opportunity to recover my health, as well as provide me with career options since I was no longer able to work in an office environment. During the process of settling on our property we became aware that Veolia had recently proposed to build an industrial waste incinerator at their Woodlawn premises. Our property is located approximately 20km east of Woodlawn.

Since moving here, we have started a primary production business selling pesticide/chemical-free cut flowers and free range eggs. We use regenerative farming practices and work to enhance the biodiversity of our land. We have an astonishing array of bird and insect and amphibian life on our property, including endangered glossy black cockatoos and a number of threatened native flora species. To protect and sustainably farm the land, we do not use any pesticides or chemicals for pest control. However, Veolia's proposed incinerator puts our regenerative farming practices, farm environment and personal health at risk.

We know that hazardous particulate emissions from the incinerator will impact us. Despite being located approximately 20km from Veolia's facility, we regularly experience odour from Veolia's operations. We experience odour so often that we have made the decision to restrict our odour reports to the EPA to protect our mental health. Losing hours of our life constantly reporting odour only compounds the distress we feel at having our home and work environment invaded by the stench of rotting garbage. At times, the odour from Veolia's Woodlawn bioreactor landfill is so offensive it has made me vomit. It also triggers migraine attacks for me, and both my partner and I have retched continuously on multiple occasions due to the offensive smell from the facility. When the odour is extremely bad, I am prevented from working outside. This is stressful as it affects my ability to work and earn a living.

The fact that we so regularly smell Veolia's current operations makes it very clear to us that we will be affected by any emissions from Veolia's proposed incinerator. Veolia has acknowledged that these emissions will include hazardous materials in particulate sizes ranging from PM10 down to nanoparticles. The incinerator emissions will include dioxins, furans, heavy metals, nitrous oxides, PFAS and more, all of which are harmful to humans and animals. Not only has Veolia acknowledged that harmful material will be emitted from the stack, they have also acknowledged to the people of Tarago that not a single one of their incinerators (65+ around the world) has managed to stay within their emissions requirements at all periods of their operation. This makes it clear that the emissions standards set by the NSW Government (which are more stringent than in most other regions Veolia operates) will be exceeded by the proposed incinerator at Tarago. Additionally, thousands of tons of dust from the transport and storage of waste ash will be blown offsite.

Our property lies in the prevailing wind direction from Veolia. We live in an extremely windy area of NSW - as evidenced by the number of wind farms. I have a heart condition, asthma, and need to work outside to earn my living. My health is particularly vulnerable to emissions such as those from the proposed incinerator, and it is inevitable our property will be impacted. Not only will we be unable to guarantee the quality and pesticide/chemical-free

nature of our flowers, European research demonstrates that poultry eggs in areas where particulate matter from incinerators is dispersed (even those built to the specifications proposed for the Tarago incinerator), are likely to be contaminated and may not be fit for human consumption. We also depend on dam water for our crops and livestock (both rainwater fed and spring fed), and roof-captured rainwater for our personal water consumption as well as for some poultry/livestock. It is inevitable that our water sources will be contaminated by emissions from the proposed incinerator.

These factors leave us with a very difficult choice. We can remain in an area where our personal health and the financial sustainability of our business is at risk, or move our farm now and work to limit the further financial hit we will incur should we be forced to move in several years time. Following the NSW Government's recent release of EFW framework review and waste and infrastructure plan (both of which used language and terms that appeared to sanction and promote EFW incineration), we have been forced into the sad and difficult decision to move out of the area.

B) Impacts of waste dumping in Tarago and the burden placed on regional communities

In the four years I have lived in Tarago, I have experienced firsthand the overwhelming burden placed upon this small regional community as a result of the transport of Sydney's waste to our town, and the proposal for an incinerator to burn Sydney's waste. I note that our local council area does not send waste to Woodlawn – this waste is all coming from out of area.

The impacts I have experienced and witnessed are:

1. Foul odour that prevents people from being outside, causes them to feel unwell, causes breathing difficulties, vomiting, and retching, affects the ability of people to work outdoors, and results in loss of income for businesses in Tarago that sell food and beverages.
2. The time and stress burden of spending 15 to 30 minutes reporting odour violations to the NSW EPA for each odour occurrence is cumulative and overwhelming, and after a prolonged period residents become so disillusioned with the lack of progress that they stop reporting completely. I personally have made over 100 odour reports in the four years we have lived here, and I estimate I have only reported odour about 50% of the time it has severely affected us at home. The reporting time burden was too overwhelming for me to report each incident. Despite numerous promises from Veolia, they are yet to develop an app for odour reporting that would make it swift and easy to report odour. Their website reporting is often not functioning correctly, and calling their reporting area takes even longer than calling the EPA in my personal experience. It once took me more than 30 minutes on the phone to make a single odour report to Veolia's phone line.
3. The local roads are full of trucks carting rubbish or fill material to Woodlawn, to the point where it is quite dangerous. The trucks come from all directions around Tarago, and at many periods of the day you will encounter more trucks than cars on the roads. The roads are in bad shape because of the incessant truck traffic both from Woodlawn and other state significant developments in the area, such as the many quarries. It is scary encountering a truck on a very narrow section or badly deteriorated section of road. I have been forced off the road several times to avoid a collision, and I have lost count of the number of times I have been rounding a bend only to encounter an oncoming truck with its wheels over the centreline. Each new SSD or modification at Woodlawn results in more trucks, and it is overwhelming.

We feel like we are living on a truck superhighway.

4. The time burden of constantly reviewing and responding to Veolia's Woodlawn modifications and proposals, along with all the other local SSD developments is overwhelming and depressing. There is a very real fear in the community (based on prior experience) that each new modification or development at Woodlawn is another way in which Veolia's operations will result in a negative impact on our quality of life. Each new modification causes stress and anxiety, and this is exacerbated by the volume of technical detail we need to review and respond to, along with the short timeframes in which to do so. As an example, the period for reviewing and responding to Veolia's Woodlawn EIS was 6 weeks, and the EIS comprised more than 3000 pages of technical documents. This caused unbelievable stress and anxiety in the community. Everyone knew the importance of thoroughly reviewing the document, and yet even a professional working a regular work week and just reviewing that document for the entire exhibition period would have struggled to complete the review in time.

Over the past 4 years we have had to review and respond to two SSD solar farm applications, the Woodlawn incinerator, Marulan quarries, and more than 5 development modifications at Woodlawn. This is in addition to the community participation required for Veolia's Woodlawn CLC and its associated time burden to review documents and minutes, along with the CCC for Develop's Woodlawn mine, and the documents related to the lead contamination remediation in Tarago. Tarago has a population of approximately 450 people (not all of them adults!), and the population in the nearby areas is not much greater. We are being buried in technical paperwork for numerous SSDs and similar developments, and in order to ensure our homes, land and lifestyles are safeguarded, we have to scrupulously review these applications and documents. It is completely overwhelming and depressing. Our everyday lives are significantly impacted by these developments, and Veolia's Woodlawn operations are the worst.

5. We are unable to trust the information provided to us by Veolia about their operations at Woodlawn, and this results in a significant fact-checking burden on the community. In many instances it also results in a financial burden as residents are required to pay GIPA fees to obtain information relating to instances of concern. When we do ask questions of Veolia, we are often fed misleading or entirely false information. I spent almost 3 years as a community representative on Veolia's Woodlawn Community Liaison Committee, and on multiple occasions Veolia provided us with false information, or failed to provide us with any information about issues that directly impacted the community. On several occasions residents needed to GIPA information to find out the details of what had occurred. In one instance, I asked Veolia about the rise in EPA risk rating at Veolia's facility, and the information presented by Veolia was contrary to the information the EPA was providing on the subject. In another instance Veolia provided different information to the EPA in regard to a prevention notice Veolia had received. Subsequent checking revealed the details the EPA provided were correct.

However, all of this places an immense time burden on the community. Veolia uses the full strength of their dedicated PR team to manage and deflect enquiries about Woodlawn in regard to anything that won't reflect positively on their operations. Veolia would have multiple members of its PR team attending CLC meetings to shape and manage conversations and communication, and their Sydney PR team would often write the articles for the local newsletter (resulting in lots of buzz words and inaccuracies in local area information). Fact

checking and countering the misinformation promoted by a professional, paid PR team chews up the time of local volunteers, impacts our home lives and our resources, and eventually leads to volunteer burnout in such a small community. I have volunteered months of my life on matters relating to the incinerator and Veolia's Woodlawn operations. And I am just one of many local residents who have been forced to do so in order to protect our community. Imagine the difference for our community if these volunteer hours could be put to use for the benefit of our town. And imagine the improvement in our mental health if we could devote those hours to a cause we enjoyed, rather than feeling that we need to volunteer to protect our families and homes and lives.

6. Veolia has an abject record in regard to environmental protection at Woodlawn. In the short period I have lived in this area, Veolia has received EPA fines and notices for leaking trucks, odour violations, waterway pollution, deliberately blocked drainage, littering neighbouring properties, and leachate mismanagement. The NSW EPA has assigned this facility its highest risk rating. It is inconceivable that the NSW Government would consider this company, with their record of environmental mismanagement, as an appropriate facilitator of an industrial incinerator that will produce millions of tons of waste ash byproducts contaminated with some of the deadliest chemicals known to humankind. Additionally, given Veolia's 20 year history of constant environmental licence breaches, only someone completely devoid of intelligence could believe that Veolia will operate within the constraints of its environmental licence for emissions and waste ash management.

Veolia has demonstrated time and time again that their desire for profit and cost-cutting outweighs all environmental considerations. One example is the recent change to the incinerator waste byproduct management in which they plan to dump the 'stabilised' waste ash byproducts directly in the landfill. Veolia states this is because they have discovered a new way to stabilise the ash (in a way that makes it safe to dump it into a facility which already has problems with leachate seeping to groundwater). In reality, the change in plans is required because the area they had allocated for their sealed storage facility cannot be used as their site water balance plans were erroneous for the past decade, and now that it has started raining they have insufficient onsite water storage. Trucking it to an appropriate storage facility would be too costly, and so miraculously Veolia have discovered it is safe to dump it straight into landfill.

7. As a result of the work done to provide Veolia with a siding for offloading rubbish at Crisps Creek intermodal, historical lead contamination along the railway corridor in Tarago was disturbed. This resulted in lead poisoning to several children, a family needing to leave their home, lead contamination of drinking water in Tarago, and ongoing lead contamination and remediation issues in town.

8. There are signs advertising Veolia all over town. Veolia is required to operate a trust to give back what feels like blood money to the local community for us putting up with their stench and environmental destruction. Anytime they issue a check through the trust fund they also put up a sign advertising that the money came from them, making the town look like it is entirely sponsored by Veolia. There is no escaping Veolia's logo and signage around town, and for the majority of people their mental association with Veolia is not pleasant. I know of several people who have left town because of the stench from Veolia's operations and the burnout from trying to enact positive change. It often feels that we are living out the Erin Brokovich movie.

9. The stress, anxiety and mental health impacts of dealing with the constant pressure of SSD

developments and environmental threats and pollution is very real. I know of multiple families who have moved out of the area as a result of this, and I have talked with numerous residents who are affected by the pressure of these proposals. Our homes should be a safe place and sanctuary. The health of our families should be considered just as valuable and worth protecting as the health of those who live in city areas. We have less access to medical care here, and life in a rural area is already more challenging and less convenient than city life. It is unfair to expect us to shoulder the burden of Sydney's waste when Sydney residents and the NSW government could do far more help resolve the waste issue in the first place.

C) Alternative solutions

It is important to recognise that in no instance has a waste incinerator been proposed in NSW and met with approval from nearby residents, or even the wider NSW population. Neither Sydney residents nor regional NSW residents are in favour of incineration as a means of dealing with waste. The move towards incineration is being pushed by powerful multinational corporations lobbying government to introduce technology that they are now finding does not meet environmental and circular economy aims in Europe. They need a new market, and this push for business expansion to counter European shutdowns and phase-outs sees Australia as one target. It's astonishing to think that Australia once had the technology to deal with medical waste and other forms of hazardous waste without incineration, and yet we have now regressed and are incinerating it.

There are countless other solutions I would heartily encourage the NSW government to embrace.

1. Zero waste solutions have worked for large cities such as San Francisco - there is no reason they cannot work for Sydney.
2. The technology available for commercial dehydration of FOGO means that each local government area should be able to invest and manage its own FOGO waste.
3. The government should encourage small businesses and innovative start-up operations to help manage waste at the source. This will help counter the monopoly companies such as Veolia have over waste management in NSW, as well as encourage waste to be treated in areas it is produced, rather than transporting it hundreds of kilometres. Methane-capture landfill when operated under proper management is a more environmentally-friendly and sustainable option for waste management than incineration.
4. Upstream reduction of waste production needs to be a key factor in government policy. Reduce waste at its source. Mandate that packaging needs to be compostable or biodegradable or recyclable in a means that will not produce hazardous chemicals.
5. Phase out oil-based plastics as a matter of urgency. The technology exists for plant-based (e.g. sugarcane) plastics and completely biodegradable products. As a resident of NSW, I would like us to lead the world in banning oil-based plastics and embracing alternative solutions. I don't know anyone who doesn't want to see traditional plastic use eliminated for the damage it does to our environment and health. Consumers will embrace alternatives, but businesses will not produce and use alternatives unless there are strong incentives to do so.
6. Use biochar technology to create carbon in oxygen-free burns of non-hazardous waste material. Not only will it reduce waste, it will also capture carbon.
7. Include zero-waste experts and circular economy experts on government advisory panels, and include these experts in the policy-making process.
8. Divest government from the waste industry lobby when making decisions about waste management issues. The waste industry does not have a financial motivation to reduce waste.

It is a contradiction to expect the waste industry to be fully committed to waste reduction when they make their money from waste volumes.

D) Emissions monitoring

The methods proposed to monitor emissions for the proposed Tarago incinerator are alarming. There are no provisions for real-time, publicly available monitoring of all pollutants. Intermittent monitoring allows a company to manufacture results that meet whatever requirements they need. Any monitoring should include all possible chemical outputs in real-time. It should be publicly available at all times. Veolia has demonstrated they cannot even keep a simple odour monitoring system online for public scrutiny at all times. The odour monitors in Tarago have been out of commission for weeks at a time since their installation. Oftentimes it wasn't until they were alerted by the community that Veolia realised the monitors weren't working.

Additionally, a major problem with the EFW emissions scheme is that there are no provisions or requirements in government policy to shut down an incinerator that is exceeding emissions standards. And no resident believes that the government will act to shut down a plant that costs more than 600 million dollars, even if it is exceeding thresholds. An EPA survey referenced in the EPA and Chief Scientist material demonstrated that the waste industry does not believe the NSW standards for WTE incineration plants are achievable. This means that operators proposing these projects are aware that emissions exceedances will occur. Any negligible fines and cautions issued by the EPA will be seen by the operator as the cost of doing business. It will result in the contamination and pollution of areas surrounding waste incinerators, and detrimental health impacts for those living nearby. The NSW EPA and Tarago residents already have ample evidence that Veolia regards EPA fines as merely the cost of doing business.