

Submission
No 989

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE
FACILITIES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the proposed Energy-from-Waste Facilities in Parkes and Regional New South Wales

I am a concerned resident, mother, wife, business owner and community member who has lived in Parkes and the Parkes Shire for the last 47 years. I wish to convey my strong opposition to the proposed construction of the Energy from Waste (EfW) Incinerator in Parkes, NSW. I am deeply concerned about the health, environmental and agricultural impacts of this project, which poses unacceptable risks to our community's wellbeing and regional sustainability.

The major concern with this proposal is the detrimental effect on human health. The incinerator is expected to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a minimum of 40 years (and possibly up to 70 years). The effects of such prolonged operation will be cumulative, irreversible and destructive.

A systematic review of the health impacts of waste incineration in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health states, "*Despite technological advancements, local and global health impacts from waste incinerators remain a concern for communities where they are being built. Adverse health outcomes in populations near waste incinerators, including cancers and reproductive dysfunction, have been demonstrated in primary studies*". The report goes on to conclude, "*This review shows contamination of food and ingestion of pollutants is a significant risk pathway for both nearby and distant residents*". "*This systematic review highlights significant risks associated with waste incineration as a form of waste management*". "*Based on a precautionary principle there is insufficient evidence to conclude that any incinerator is safe*". "*Local community groups have a basis for legitimate concern*".

It is unfathomable and defies logic that such clear findings – supported by this and many other studies – are being ignored in the consideration of an incinerator for Parkes.

Personal and Health Impacts

Our youngest daughter has Cystic Fibrosis (CF), a genetic condition that causes thick, sticky mucus throughout the body, affecting the lungs, pancreas and other organs. Her daily treatment involves multiple medications, nebulised therapies, physiotherapy, dietary management and exercise. We have worked closely with the CF team at Westmead Children's Hospital for nearly two decades. Their guidance and education have consistently emphasised the need to avoid environmental pollution.

We have gone to great lengths to minimise risk and exposure to pollutants. Increased air pollution is particularly dangerous for anyone with CF, as it causes inflammation and infection, leading to irreversible lung damage. We have always attributed the clean country air and environment as being vital to our daughter's health. The proposed incinerator would directly threaten this and jeopardise her wellbeing.

Our family has worked too hard to safeguard her health to see it sacrificed. Good health is non-negotiable – it cannot be bought, replaced or restored once lost.

Furthermore, airborne pollutants with smaller particle sizes penetrate deeper into the lungs and are much harder to treat. Treatments are gruelling, multi-faceted, time consuming, costly and take a toll on the body. The proponents claim the emissions from the incinerator will only be nanoparticles, but that is precisely the concern – such particles travel further in the air, are invisible and are more harmful when inhaled.

My parents, my husband's parents, older children and their spouses, and three young grandchildren all live in Parkes or the surrounding Shire. The stress, worry, sleepless nights and concern over this project cannot be underestimated. It will have a profound effect on our family and our health – particularly our daughter's - and may ultimately force us to move away, something we do not wish to do.

Legislative and Policy Inconsistencies

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has banned new waste-to-energy incinerator facilities.

In New South Wales, current legislation bans energy-from-waste production in Greater Sydney and prohibits it in most of the state, except for four designated regional areas, including Parkes. One reason for this policy is the *precautionary principle* – to minimise potential harm to public health.

It is unjust that not all NSW residents are afforded equal protection. The health and welfare of regional communities such as Parkes are not less important or more disposable than those in metropolitan areas.

In 2018, the Independent Planning Commission's (IPC) rejected the proposed Eastern Creek EfW facility. The Department's Assessment Report concluded there were "*long-term risks to the environment and the health of the local community*". The Department recommended refusal of the proposal, noting that "*the impacts to air quality and risk to human health are unknown*". These findings are directly relevant to the Parkes proposal and demonstrate that the significant risks associated with EfW facilities remain unresolved.

If an EfW incineration facility is considered unacceptable or too risky for metropolitan populations, it should not be deemed acceptable for Parkes or any other community in NSW. There should be no double standards when it comes to the health and safety of communities.

Efforts and resources should instead be directed toward developing alternate solutions to Sydney's waste challenges. Options include improving collection and sorting systems, prioritising the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle), conducting comprehensive waste audits to better identify waste streams and adopting a circular economy approach to minimise waste generation and maximise resource recovery.

If Sydney residents were made aware that red-bin collections could cease after 2030, I am confident that innovative solutions would emerge. The younger generation, in particular, have creative ideas that could help address waste challenges. Initiatives such as involving schools in projects to develop practical solutions would not only raise awareness but also foster engagement and collective responsibility. Awareness and education are an important first step toward meaningful change.

Globally, energy recovery facilities are being phased out or restricted due to emission concerns, their substantial carbon footprint and the toxic legacies of millions of tonnes of contaminated ash.

Agricultural and Environmental Impacts

Parkes and its surrounding region have a very proud history of agricultural production. Establishing an EfW facility in Parkes near farms and prime agricultural land raises serious concerns about long-term contamination. Emissions from the facility will release harmful

pollutants and toxins into the air, soil and water. These effects are cumulative and irreversible, threatening the region's agricultural enterprises.

Local farming families – many multi-generational – have spent decades refining livestock breeding programs, improving soil health, and developing sustainable practices. All this could be rendered useless once contamination occurs. Farmers take pride in producing livestock and crops to a high standard for human consumption and are bound by national declarations providing assurance to consumers about the safety and quality of agricultural goods. An EfW facility would undermine this integrity and devastate the region's agricultural economy, with serious adverse flow-on effects for the broader community. The potential for harmful substances to enter the food supply chain is particularly alarming.

In France, health authorities have warned residents across 410 municipalities in urban Paris not to eat eggs from domestic coops after studies confirmed contamination of soil and eggs by forever chemicals and other toxins. The ToxicoWatch Foundation reported ubiquitous contamination of soil and eggs from domestic chicken farms in Paris and the inner suburbs by persistent organic pollutants [POPs]. The root cause stems from hens foraging on polluted soil.

Our family has kept chickens for most of my life, grown vegetables and consumed local beef. Many residents across the region do the same. The thought of losing the ability to safely grow and eat local food is deeply distressing.

The Public Health Association of Australia reported in its 2024 Policy Position Statement on Waste Incineration reported that “*waste incinerators are associated with health harms*” and recommended that “*new incinerators should be located away from areas of food production*” and that “*food grown near an incinerator should be avoided*”.

Water is another concern. Many local residents and farmers rely solely on rainwater tanks and dams for their water supply. Airborne pollutants can contaminate these sources, as well as creeks and rivers through runoff. During dry periods or drought, the Parkes' town water supply is already under pressure – and the EfW facility's water demand would only worsen the situation.

Misleading Representations and Safety Concerns

The proponents' public messaging has been misleading. The Parkes Energy Recovery (PER) website promotes the project as delivering a reliable source of energy for NSW and instead of waste being discarded and sent to landfill, it will be turned into electricity to power homes, businesses and communities across NSW, producing power for 80,000 homes. In reality, the power generated will remain within the Special Activation Precinct (SAP) intended for use by other new businesses in the SAP.

The PER group indicates that non-hazardous residual waste will be processed. At the community information session, an engineer (PER representative) explained that waste assessment occurs at three checkpoints: by the garbage truck driver via a camera on the truck, the loader operator at a bulk facility, and a remote claw operator at the EfW site. Bags of rubbish will not be opened or properly inspected. This superficial process cannot guarantee that hazardous materials – such as batteries, PVC pipe, aerosols, paints, plastics etc – are excluded. It is therefore inaccurate to claim that only non-hazardous residual waste will be processed.

The same engineer explained that stack sampling would occur only every six-months, with results taking 48 hours to process. Continuous monitoring of all emissions should be mandatory, not periodic.

Processing 600,000 tonnes of waste annually will produce 120,000 tonnes of bottom ash and 20,000 tonnes of toxic fly ash. The fly ash would need to be transported to a restricted solid waste landfill, currently located in Kemps Creek, Sydney – requiring an estimated 4-5 truckloads of hazardous material per day on regional roads. Managing the remaining 120,000 tonnes of bottom ash presents further usability, storage, transport and safety challenges.

The transportation of unchecked material over approximately 500 km's by rail through towns and regional areas poses additional risks, especially in summer. Furthermore, the constant transportation of waste to regional areas, fly ash back to Sydney and bottom ash to other locations adds unnecessary emissions, costs and increased risks to community and environmental safety.

Finally, community consultation has been inadequate and lacking transparency. Many residents only became aware of the project after public announcements by the proponents, rather than through early and open engagement.

Conclusion

For all the reasons outlined - the well-documented health risks, the environmental and agricultural threats, the inequitable burden placed on regional communities, and the lack of transparency and meaningful consultation, I strongly urge the Parliamentary Committee to reject the proposed Energy-from-Waste facility in Parkes and any similar regional proposals in NSW.

This project would place an unacceptable risk on the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community. It is not a solution to Sydney's waste problem and should not be foisted on communities.

The precautionary principle must guide decisions of this magnitude: when human health and environmental integrity are at stake, it is far better to prevent harm than to manage it after it occurs. Regional NSW deserves the same protection, consideration, and respect afforded to metropolitan areas.

I urge the Committee to prioritise the long-term health, sustainability, and prosperity of communities like Parkes over short-term waste disposal solutions.

REFERENCES

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