

Submission  
No 1005

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSED ENERGY FROM WASTE  
FACILITIES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

## Submission to Parkes Waste to Energy Proposal

My name is . I have lived in Parkes for 23 years and am married to a local. We have raised our child here. I work as a School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) at a local public school. Our family, like many others in Parkes, is deeply connected to the wellbeing of this community. My adult child and I both suffer from asthma, and my husband is currently undergoing cancer treatment. We depend on clean air, safe water, and a stable environment – not only for our physical health, but for our mental wellbeing. We would have to seriously consider leaving Parkes if we could no longer count on these things.

I write to strongly oppose the proposed incinerator (waste-to-energy facility) in Parkes for a wide range of reasons: predicted emissions and the impacts on human health - including on regional town drinking water and rainwater harvesting, and soil contamination; impact on agriculture and the environment; social and economic impacts on our town and the wider community; the legislative inequity of such a proposal; the lack of transparency and meaningful community consultation thus far; and the continuation of a reactive approach to Sydney's waste issues rather than a proactive, multi-faceted, and environmentally sustainable approach.

### 1. Emissions and the impacts on human health, agriculture, and the environment

The proponents of this facility liken 99.9% of its emissions to components of normal air and steam. Yet, in Parkes Energy Recovery's Community Q&A document of July 2025 (pg 7, Technology section 15), it states that **there is no monitoring equipment that can continuously measure particles of dioxins and furans.**

It goes on to say tests will be conducted quarterly in the first year of operation, and two measurements per year after that. That leaves a great deal of the year without testing for pollutants that the World Health Organisation links to serious health problems in humans.

Parkes Energy Recovery's website states:

“Modern EfW facilities operate in dense urban centres, close to houses and natural ecosystems, including farming and agricultural land. Monitoring results from these areas show negligible adverse impacts. The instances of contamination you may have heard about likely come from outdated facilities operating before strict European Union standards were introduced in 2000.”

However, The Public Health Association of Australia's 2024 Waste Policy (section 9) notes this evidence:

“Industry claims that newer incinerator technologies may reduce exposure, however, since many health effects require cumulative exposure and may take many years to manifest, it will be difficult to measure any improved safety from modern incinerator designs for decades, so it is premature to conclude that these newer technologies improve safety.”

The incineration of plastics releases dangerous toxins - some of which are known carcinogens - and releases more carbon dioxide into the environment than the burning of coal. Even small emissions are cumulative over time and can build up in the cells of living organisms. We already have a high cancer rate in Parkes. There is a legitimate basis for community concerns regarding this project which are already causing huge emotional strain in my household and others.

The Policy (section 14 Policy and Regulation, points f.) and g.) goes on to clearly state that “**new incinerators should be located away from areas of food production**” and “**food grown near an incinerator should be avoided**” – yet Parkes is surrounded by agriculture. We run local community markets, and have a strong homegrown food and nursery culture. This facility threatens all of that.

Clean and safe drinking water is imperative for everyone. Along with the town drinking water supply, many Parkes residents rely heavily on rainwater collection. The potential for contamination through airborne pollutants or ash is extremely worrying. How will this project affect water quality and supply, especially during droughts when fire risk is high and supply is limited?

Bottom ash and fly ash – toxic by-products of incineration – have been used in road construction in Europe, where rain has caused leaching of these toxic pollutants into the environment. Parkes Energy Recovery’s website states that “any leftover material will be recycled and reused, for example, in road construction”. This risk must not be ignored here. If the project were to go ahead, the community has the right to demand that **baseline health and environmental testing** be conducted at the company’s expense – and made publicly available.

Our family is already under immense health stress; adding a toxic burden to the air we breathe and the water we use is unacceptable. My husband is undergoing cancer treatment, and all of these stressors are detrimental to his condition. We are parents to an adult child with developmental disability, and multiple complex neurological and mental health conditions. Change is distressing for them. If this proposed facility were to go ahead, we would seriously have to consider leaving Parkes – a huge change for them, having been born and raised here.

Mental health providers here are limited, and over the years we have painstakingly formed a team of professionals to provide the services and support my child needs, many of whom we already have to travel to Orange to see. We would have to start this

process all over again if we had to move – the stress would be phenomenal. This is compounded by the concern about the decline in Parkes house values that this project could cause, thereby limiting our relocation options.

## **2. Social and Economic Impact on Parkes and the wider community**

There will be consequences to Parkes' and the wider community's future:

- Decline in house values
- Loss of markets for the area's produce as food provenance will be compromised due to growing areas being subjected to cumulative exposure to toxins - resulting in reduced supply and therefore further raising the cost of living and threatening food security for the wider population
- Loss of skilled professionals: teachers, doctors, nurses, mental health workers – of which there is already a chronic shortage of in Parkes
- Risk to **tourism**, particularly events like the Elvis Festival – I have been advised that some sponsors of the event would most likely withdraw their sponsorship if the project proceeded
- Strain on water use – Parkes has faced crippling droughts in the past, irrigators are already under restriction, and this facility will require significant water for its operations
- Loss of trust in local and state government representation

This project could change the very makeup of our town, forcing good people to leave.

## **3. Inequity of Legislation**

Why is it acceptable for Parkes to host a facility that has been deemed unacceptable in most areas of the state and that other areas have refused to accept? This reeks of **environmental injustice**. Regulation is not applied fairly. Communities like ours – regional and with limited resources – are seen as “easy” targets.

Based on their past performance in regional areas, I have **no faith in the EPA to act in the best interest of the people of Parkes**. Two recent examples of them failing to protect communities are the delaying/hampering of the release of reporting of lead exposure from mining in Broken Hill, as well as unacceptable delay in acting regarding high levels of PFOS in the Belubula River. Who will monitor the Parkes facility? How often? Will monitoring data be public? Who oversees the company – the state government, the council, or someone else?

As a community, we have the right to demand:

- Emissions monitoring to be transparent, real-time monitoring – during regular operations **and** during startup and shutdowns, when emissions are at a higher level
- Oversight by an **independent** authority
- Public health and environmental impact assessments updated annually

#### **4. Lack of Transparency, Misleading Public Messaging and Lack of Community Consultation**

In 2018, when the NSW State Government announced its Special Activation Precinct in Parkes, there was no proper community consultation. The first we heard about this project was as a “resource recovery centre” that would promote a “circular economy”, which sounded environmentally friendly. Now, in March 2025, we find out it’s an incinerator. This feels like greenwashing under the term “circular economy” – but there is nothing circular about burning waste. Incineration destroys materials forever.

**Why has it taken seven years from planning to finally talk to the community?** Where was the provision of accessible, clear, and independently verified information to the community to allow fully informed, balanced and transparent discussion of both pros and cons between the community, proponents and Council? It is the right of the community to have their collective voice heard regarding which developments are allowed in the shire.

#### **5. Environmental Policy and Alternatives**

Sydney’s waste and the waste’s mismanagement is **Sydney’s problem** – it should not constitute an environmental disaster for Parkes or anywhere else. For example, many Sydney council areas only allow garden waste to go into their green bins – organic kitchen waste is still being directed to red-bin waste and therefore goes into landfill, thereby directly contributing to the release of greenhouse gases into the environment. Why is bringing a project such as this to Parkes even being contemplated when such basic measures as diverting organic kitchen waste to green bins are not being taken?

Transporting waste by train to Parkes and then the final waste products back again to be “safely managed” (as per Parkes Energy Recovery’s literature) is not environmentally sound – it creates more emissions, increasing the carbon footprint of the whole project, and greatly increases the costs of waste management. This is **not a local solution**, it’s exploitation. It is not even a permanent solution – these types of facilities typically have a limited lifespan. Unfortunately, the accumulated damage to the agricultural land and the community will last for generations.

Other nations are moving away from incineration. In Europe, incinerators are being decommissioned. We should be looking to **better alternatives** like:

- **Reducing Sydney’s red-bin waste** through education, composting, and recycling
- Using **compostable polymers** instead of soft plastics where possible, for example, in packaging
- **Re-manufacturing soft plastics** into new products
- **Concentrated solar power plants** to generate green hydrogen and contribute to a real circular economy

## 6. Final Questions

- Can it be unequivocally proven that this proposed project is safe in the long term?
- Will this facility be expanded to burn international waste in future (China, Bali, etc.)?
- Can you guarantee there will be no toxic releases during regular operations, or from start-ups, shut-downs, and malfunction events?
- Will the emissions standards take into account cumulative exposure over decades?
- Will emissions be made public in real time?
- How will PFAS emissions be monitored and measured?
- If there are negative health and/or economic effects on Parkes and the broader community, who will be responsible for restitution/compensation?

As a community, we have the right to demand:

- A full **independent review**
- Health, water, and soil testing **before** the project begins
- Direct community consultation and representation in decision-making
- Full transparency about costs, risks, and alternatives

## Conclusion

This is not what Parkes needs. It’s not just about “waste to energy” – it’s about the health, safety, and future of real families like mine. We deserve a clean, fair, and sustainable future. I strongly urge decision-makers to reconsider this project and explore truly circular, community-led alternatives.