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Objection to the Tarago Incinerator – Woodlawn ARC:SSD-21184278

My name is Helen Rex and I live in Gundaroo. Our rural and regional area although close to larger communities such as Canberra and Goulburn is still a wonderful place to bring up children and to live. We have a strong community of people who are interested in keeping our region environmentally friendly, improving our region and ensuring a long lasting place for our children and grandchildren to be brought up in. I strongly object to Veolia's proposed incinerator being built in Tarago.

I believe that Veolia's toxic industrial waste incinerator will be extremely bad for the surrounding communities it terms of the health of the residents and the environment. It will probably impact property values in surrounding areas and will have a negative impact on the region in the future. My children and their future is likely to be impacted as well. Why should our small village be adversely affected by the burning of waste that is generated over 2 hundred kilometres away, the flip side of this is that all our waste should be shipped to Sydney. This is a situation in which small communities are made the dumping grounds for the politics of Sydney.

The future for all of us is ensuring that we change our views with regards to our environmentalism and the acceptance of things like this is incinerator is not putting the future first.

I object to the incinerator for numerous reasons and some of these are outlined below:-

- 1. This incinerator is not necessary**

The existing Woodlawn landfill still has a useful life left of approximately 25 years. The amount of waste generated should be reduced by the implementation of the NSW Government's circular economy policies meaning that Woodlawn life will be extended further. Therefore, there is no need to divert this waste to Tarago to pollute our region.

2. This incinerator will be toxic to our health and environment

Veolia's incinerator proposal will emit toxic air pollution 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for 25 years, which will spread throughout the region from Canberra to Goulburn, Braidwood, Bungendore, Murrumbateman, Gunning, Marulan, Yass and my home of Gundaroo to name just a few.

The pollution from the proposed incinerator will include acid gases, toxic heavy metal particulates (mercury, lead cadmium) and persistent organic particulates (dioxins, furans, PCBs, PFAS). Particulate pollution can lead to decreased lung function, cardiac disease and death. In addition to polluting the air, dioxins and furans will accumulate in the surrounding environment over time in soil and water and are absorbed by plants, crops and animals, therefore ruining our environment.

Food contaminated by incinerator toxins can cause cancer, miscarriage, infant deaths, developmental delays, reproductive issues, heart disease and respiratory impairment. To put this in a regional and rural area which produces food for many many people is too great a risk.

The proposal will create 2.2million tonnes of toxic waste ash, including 380,000 tonnes of air pollution control residue (fly ash) which is classified as hazardous waste by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). All of this will be dumped on site, risking further contamination of soil and groundwater as well as the Sydney water catchment. Veolia's track record of polluting local groundwaters (recognised by EPA prevention notice in October 2022) proves they cannot be trusted to safely manage such toxic outputs.

This proposed incinerator will impact the health of our children, grandchildren and their grandchildren and this includes my own children through the accumulation of chemicals which are going to remain in the surrounding environment forever. It is an intergenerational burden and legacy which cannot be allowed to go ahead. This is totally unacceptable as a legacy for our future generations.

The NSW Government acknowledges in its own Energy from Waste Infrastructure Plan that waste incinerators impact human health stating "Populations can still experience health impacts when emissions are below the national standards, and for some common air pollutants, there is no safe threshold of impact". Given this statement it is self-evident that this proposal should be rejected.

The proposal has already caused significant detrimental negative impact to surrounding communities' mental health by increasing anxiety and depression. This will only be increased if the project goes ahead as those living nearby continue to stress about when their health will start to show the impacts of the pollution from the facility, or having to stay indoors. This increases the existing known issues surrounding mental health in rural and regional communities.

The proposed incinerator will exceed NSW government safety standards for air emissions during start-up, shut-down and many other 'non-standard' operating conditions. Veolia's overseas incinerators often exceed safety standards and Veolia has a track record locally for failing to comply with license conditions at their existing Woodlawn facility.

3. Not safe for Sydney, then not safe for any community

The Eastern Creek waste incinerator in Sydney was rejected by the NSW Independent Planning Commission in July 2018, as not being in the public interest. The reasons included concerns about safety, insufficient evidence that the pollution control technologies would be capable of managing emissions, concern about the relationship between air quality impacts and water quality impacts, the possibility of adverse environmental outcomes, and concern about site suitability and human health impacts. Since then, the NSW Government has banned toxic waste incinerators in Sydney due to the risk to human health. The risks have not changed since that decision back in 2018 – this project must also be rejected - If they aren't safe for Sydney then they aren't safe for Tarago. Why should another community be impacted with an unsafe incinerator for the purpose of removing waste from the community in which it has been determined the facility is unsafe for.

4. There is no social licence for this in this area

The NSW Energy from Waste Policy states that incinerator proposals are only valid where "community acceptance to operate such a process has been obtained". There is no community acceptance for a facility in Tarago or anywhere in the Southern Tablelands.

Social license is made up of three components:

- Legitimacy – do they play by the rules?
- Credibility – do they provide honest information?
- Trust – can the community be confident that they will do what they say?

Veolia have spent over 15 years failing to operate their existing Woodlawn facility within license conditions, have received multiple infringements, failed to inform the community of pollution to the environment, and attempted to withhold information from the community under freedom of information processes.

Veolia's track record shows they break the rules, hide information from the community and pollute the environment.