

My name is Ayla Pentikainen, and I am a resident of Currawang NSW 2580. I strongly object to the waste incinerator being proposed by Veolia at Tarago, for the reasons listed below.

1/ There is no guarantee that the waste incinerator is safe for human, animal or plant life

The long-term effects of waste incineration pollution on human health (particularly over generations) needs to be better researched and calculated, before installing a waste incineration system with such high potential for long-term detrimental health consequences. Many people reside in and around Tarago, including children and elderly who would be most vulnerable and likely to suffer from the side effects of air, water and food contamination.

Many studies so far have shown that waste incineration is dangerous to human health, and puts pollutants into the air and ground that persist for a very, very long time. We simply cannot ignore these studies and think “she’ll be right” when there is such a high risk of serious health and environmental consequences linked to waste incineration.

By way of example, throughout the early- to mid-20th century, arsenic was routinely used in pesticides across the world with little regard to the long-term impact this would have. The result today is that in many parts of the world, rice still continues to be contaminated with arsenic, simply because of the persistence of arsenic in the ground over many decades. Australia, which relies heavily on agriculture, should be learning from mistakes like this, and not rush into making decisions that could lead to long term contamination of the land and water.

2/ The waste incinerator would be destructive to small business in the local region

In our local region there are many small businesses operating, which rely on the peace and clean air that the country provides. As a marketing professional, I can tell you that here in the Southern Highlands there is huge value in “clean country air” as well as clean water and clean food, for promoting local businesses operating here and attracting clientele. The businesses that rely on this include local wineries (eg Lake George Winery, Lerida Estate), cafes (eg Some Café), olive groves (eg Federa Olive Grove), guest accommodation and retreats, health therapies and health spas, plant nurseries (eg Nirvalley), and cattle and sheep farmers.

The pollution caused by waste incineration would undercut these businesses in various ways. In the case of wineries and nurseries, they may no longer be able to grow healthy plants which are core to their business, likewise with cattle and sheep farmers who may over the long term have livestock that are not fit for human consumption. Having polluted air undermines any health retreats in the area, as no one will be able to or want to be treated somewhere where the air and water is contaminated with pollutants. As for cafes, guest accommodation, wedding services and similar, the beautiful country ambience they rely on would be stripped away and these businesses unable to attract interstate clientele.

While Veolia may claim that the waste incinerator would create jobs, the number of these jobs would be very small compared with the number of residents currently employed in local small businesses. Due to the very niche nature of the jobs created by the waste incinerator and specialist skills involved, the jobs are unlikely to be suitable for locals anyway, and would probably utilise skilled interstate ‘fly in fly out’ workers instead.

It is simply not fair nor beneficial to the local economy in any way, to allow the construction of a single business such as the waste incinerator by Veolia, at the potential cost of destroying many other small businesses around it.

3/ Veolia have demonstrated that they are unable to properly assess and manage the risks involved with their facilities.

The current Tarago Woodlawn Eco Precinct features a bioreactor landfill and bioenergy plant operated by Veolia. The current state of this facility is a clear demonstration that Veolia are unable to adequately predict and control their own emissions, which leads me to seriously doubt that they will be able to assess, contain or control pollution released by their proposed waste incinerator.

The local community already has a difficult time fighting the odour emissions from the Veolia Woodlawn facility, which have been affecting the local area for quite some time. This is not theoretical, but is real, and the unpleasant odour from the Woodlawn facility is something that local residents have already been subjected to and had to suffer with for years – a smell likened to flatulence. Some days the smell is so strong that you need to cover your nose, and cannot ignore it even if you try, even here in Currawang which is approximately 20km from the Woodlawn site. On a rainy or foggy day, you can often smell it in the car when driving to Canberra along Lake George.

Veolia themselves recognise the odour emission problem from Woodlawn, as evidenced by a message on their own website. Despite this, the odour persists, particularly on rainy and foggy days. This demonstrates not only an unwillingness of Veolia to act urgently to fix the situation at Woodlawn, but also that Veolia did not have an adequate risk management strategy in place for handling odours, before the facility even came into operation.

Risk management is a serious undertaking for any large-scale business, and it is highly surprising that Veolia did not have a risk mitigation plan in place to handle odour caused by its bioreactor landfill and bioenergy plant, which seems quite an obvious risk for any landfill. After all, everyone knows that garbage tips stink. Instead, on the official Veolia website they talk about different methods they are trialling to reduce the smell, as though they never expected to come across this problem:

"As part of our focus on potential odour sources on site we have identified a storage pond that will need some extra aeration... We have purchased a portable aeration unit which is to be installed on the dam in the coming weeks. We will measure oxygen production and organics reduction. If successful we can order more of these... We are also in the process of acquiring a portable carbon filter that can be used on the waste surface to draw in air and treat potential odour from problematic areas. We plan to purchase 2 units for trialling in the coming months... feedback is invaluable to us and will be used to determine what is working and what new ideas we can try." Source: <https://www.veolia.com/anz/WoodlawnEcoPrecinct>

This risk really should have been identified and these or similar units trialled (and implemented) well before the facility came into operation, not after the problem has occurred. If Veolia cannot properly assess and mitigate the risks caused by its Woodlawn facility, I do not trust that Veolia will properly assess the risks nor control its emissions from a waste incinerator either, which will have significantly more dangerous consequences than just a bad smell. We cannot accept this haphazard approach to risk mitigation that Veolia have demonstrated at the Woodlawn facility.

4/ There has been no community consultation or information distributed about this development in the Currawang/Collector region

For such a large development proposal, I find it highly disturbing and disappointing that Veolia have not communicated any information to local Currawang and Collector residents about the proposed

waste incinerator. While I do not live in Tarago directly, Currawang and Collector where I do live is close enough to be affected by this development. To my knowledge as a Currawang/Collector resident who takes interest in local affairs, there has been no public information sessions or flyers distributed by Veolia about their proposed waste incinerator in our area. My family found out about the proposed waste incinerator through a local environmental activist, not through Veolia themselves which is where the message really ought to have come.

This means that a large number of locals are still unaware of this proposed development, and therefore have not had proper opportunity to place a submission about it or provide their feedback in other ways. It is not fair to dismiss the opinion of local residents simply because they were unaware of the development, and to dismiss these individuals means that the local sentiment around this major project has not been fully captured.

Veolia should be required to communicate this information to local residents (not only Tarago, but all surrounding regions that will be affected) through flyers and information sessions so that locals are fully aware of the proposed waste incinerator and what it entails, with ample opportunity for them to provide feedback, before a decision is made on whether it should go ahead or not.

5/ The waste incinerator would be disruptive to everyday life and natural environment

My family, consisting of myself, my partner and my 4 year old daughter, choose to live in this region for the clean air and closeness to nature that this area is known for. Projects that risk creating severe air, water and land pollution create stress and impact on our right to peace and enjoyment of our property that we purchased this land and home for. We share this feeling with almost all the other locals here, who choose to live in this region for similar reasons.

Many studies have shown that waste incinerators are unsafe and detrimental to animal and plant life, and contribute towards pollution and increased CO2 emissions. A waste incinerator which has the potential of polluting our waterways, air, land and environment would prevent our enjoyment of our property, which we have a right to as property owners and rate-payers in this region. It also has the potential to disrupt the local natural environment we have chosen to live alongside, sickening native local flora and fauna, as well as human-life.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter of objection. It is my hope that you will take serious consideration of these concerns for both myself, and the many other local residents who share the same concerns.

Regards,

Ayla Pentikainen

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