

SSD-24668706 Weston Aluminium Additional Waste Streams

I am writing to object to SSD-24668706 Weston Aluminium Additional Waste Streams. The reasons for my objection centre around the following issues, which I will enlarge on below.

My objections:

- Inadequate community consultation
- Unsuitable site for a thermal waste facility
- Inadequate management systems in place
- Alarming array of toxic and hazardous wastes to be treated and ill-defined treatment processes

Inadequate community consultation:

- The Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) requires the EIS to address Community and Stakeholder Engagement, including the "community and surrounding landowners and occupiers". The Consultation section required consultation with "surrounding local landowners, businesses and stakeholders".
- A Project Update flyer was distributed to local businesses and "community groups" in August 2022, but NOT the "surrounding landowners and occupiers" or general community.
- The only "community group" consulted was Kurri Kurri Landcare - their response was a suggestion to relocate the plant to an alternate site. This did not result in any change to the proposal - just a statement that it was allowable under the E5 Heavy Industrial zoning.
- Weston Aluminium placed a small black and white notice in the Company Notices of the Classifieds in The Advertiser on November 9th 2022, for a drop-in day on 17th November. The ad states "Weston Aluminium invite members of the community to attend an information drop-in day regarding their proposal to the alteration of waste streams to be managed at their resource recovery facility located at 129 Mitchell Ave, Kurri Kurri." The word "alteration" differs significantly to the subsequent application for "additional" waste streams,

downplaying the consequences. Even if people had seen this ad, they would not necessarily have been alarmed enough to attend. Attending in person was the only option provided – no website, no survey, no contact number.

- For comparison, another State Significant Development was also advertised in the Advertiser on 9th November. It had a quarter page colour ad on page 9, <https://digital-print-edition.austcommunitymedia.com.au/CA/2022/11/09/3dissue/index.html> and also an article on page 4 headlined “Have your say on major new venue”. The quarter page ad was also in the 2nd November issue of the Advertiser. A website link and QR code were provided for people to read more about the development, complete a short survey, or register to attend a virtual information session. It was also clearly stated “The purpose of the consultation is to inform the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed development.”
- As suggested above, stakeholder engagement through local media can be done well, or it can be done poorly, as in the Weston Aluminium case. It should be noted that only approx 400 copies of The Advertiser are distributed to Kurri, with people able to pick them up for free around town eg the newsagent, the library etc. It is not an adequate strategy on its own to engage with the community on a State Significant Development in Kurri.
- Kurri High P&C was not contacted, despite being downwind of the plant and 800 school students being subject to any fallout or offensive odours from the plant. None of the sporting bodies that use Birrale Park were notified.
- Very few residents in Weston, Kurri and Surrounds received letters advising that the EIS had gone on public exhibition. Most people who became aware of the proposal saw comments about the proposal on the Kurri Kurri Noticeboard, a community facebook group.
- The SEARs state that “The EIS must include an assessment of the potential impacts of the proposal (including cumulative impacts) and develop appropriate measures to avoid, mitigate, manage and/or offset these impacts.” One way of identifying these impacts is to carry out an effective Community and Stakeholder Engagement – ie making sure the community understands the proposal and identifying the concerns they may have and addressing them in the EIS. Instead, this developer has run a woeful Community and Stakeholder Engagement, and is

now relying on the EIS process to flush out the issues. This means that the community has to wade through vast amounts of documentation to understand exactly what is being proposed and engage with an online system most are unfamiliar with to make their concerns known.

- The clock should stop on this project until a well-advertised public community meeting is held to inform the local community what is proposed and what the risks are.

Unsuitable site for a thermal waste facility

- Weston Aluminium is increasingly in an unsuitable location for an expanding thermal waste processing facility. The closest houses in Kurri are only 700 metres away. The surrounding area is changing from rural to residential, with increased housing density for nearby Loxford, Sawyers Gully, Gingers Lane and Cliftleigh. It is inappropriate to bring additional hazardous waste into an area that is becoming much more densely populated, putting greater numbers of residents at risk whenever anything goes wrong.
- The EIS states that waste and in particular hazardous waste is a growing problem. Clearly Weston Aluminium is not going to be processing dross or spent pot linings, as Tomago Aluminium has a proposal in to Planning to build their own dross processing facility. The concern to the community is that Weston Aluminium will continue to expand and diversify, bringing an increasing tonnage and more hazardous wastes into an area that is already too close to residents.
- The massive fire in November 2021 saw a huge plume of toxic black smoke head over Kurri High School and the surrounding residential area. The high school was forced to close for 2 days and residents were sealed in their own homes with doors and windows closed. This fire clearly demonstrates that the waste facility is too close to residential areas of Kurri.



- Weston Aluminium is only 100m from Swamp Creek, which runs through the proposed new residential area, Loxford Waters, via Wentworth Swamp, into Wallis Creek and ultimately into the Hunter River. There is potential for hazardous substances to enter the creek, leech into ground water and contaminate the surrounding area, impacting on aquatic and other wildlife.
- Council's 'Swamp/Fishery Creek Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan' showed water levels entering the Weston Aluminium site during the 2007 Pasher Bulka storm. Water levels have been higher since, in the April 2015 and July 2022 storms. This is no place to be storing Dangerous Goods, with a risk of them being swept into rising flood waters.
- Kurri Kurri Highschool is directly in line with prevailing winds for a large part of the year. This exposes 800 students to direct contact with potentially toxic airborne particles and offensive odours, which are difficult to remove from waste gases. Kurri Kurri TAFE is also in line with prevailing winds and is another large population in close proximity to this site.
- Many residents in the vicinity of the high school have complained to the EPA of offensive odours suspected of coming from the Weston Aluminium site. How can we be assured that this problem will not become even worse with the treatment of new waste products, or the introduction of new treatment processes?
- Residents are concerned that windborne waste has the potential to reach surrounding houses, schools and the town centre from stockpiles of waste onsite, or in the process of unloading waste from truck to warehouse.
- Weston Aluminium is situated on bushfire prone land, and there is a potential for substances kept on the premises to have a negative impact on the surrounding wildlife, waterways, ecosystems, biodiversity, air quality and natural environment in the event of a bushfire. An out-of-control bushfire could lead to another massive fire on the site, as we saw in November 2021.
- The building proposed for new thermochemical treatment processes, the Aldex Building, actually burnt down during the fire in 2021. This would seem to be an ideal time to relocate to a more suitable site, further away from residential areas, and build there.

Inadequate management systems in place

- Following the fire in November 2021, the EPA inspected the site and issued a Prevention Notice, which included the following observations:

Fire at the Premises

Z. On Sunday 14 November 2021, a major fire occurred at the Premises, causing extensive damage to structures, plant, equipment, and materials (the Fire).

AA. At the time of the Fire, large quantities of waste destined for disposal in the thermal waste treatment plant was stored at the Premises including, but not limited to:

- (a) paints and solvents;
- (b) clinical waste;
- (c) pharmaceutical waste; and
- (d) quarantine waste; Inspections of the Premises

AB. The EPA has inspected the Premises several times since the Fire. As a result of those inspections and investigations conducted by the EPA to date, the EPA reasonably suspects that:

- (a) At the time of the Fire, a large proportion of the waste described above was stored outside buildings and was not stored within constructed bunds;
- (b) At the time of the fire, large amounts of clinical and related waste was not stored in designated or clearly marked and identifiable areas at the Premises;
- (c) Before and after the Fire, waste containers were not clearly marked or labelled to describe their contents;
- (d) Before and after the Fire, different types of waste that should be segregated were stored together;
- (e) Waste, including Clinical and related waste intended to be disposed of in the thermal waste treatment plant was odourous;
- (f) Waste, including waste intended to be disposed of in the thermal waste treatment plant has not been securely or effectively contained or packaged;
- (g) Before the fire, Weston Aluminium prioritised producing aluminium pucks in the reverberatory furnace over disposing of waste in the thermal waste treatment plant;
- h) Waste to be disposed of in the thermal waste treatment plant, including anatomical waste and cytotoxic waste has been stored at the Premises for several months, has accumulated and potentially degraded, increasing the risks associated with the waste;

(i) Weston Aluminium continues to prioritise producing aluminium pucks in the reverberatory furnace over disposing of waste in the thermal waste treatment plant and does not have a definite plan to remove or dispose of remaining waste that can be disposed of in the thermal waste treatment plant.

- Why are we even discussing allowing this operator to expand the range of wastes that they receive? And to receive even more hazardous wastes? Clearly, they were not storing, segregating or labelling the previously accepted waste streams in an environmentally safe manner or processing them in a timely manner. How can the community possibly be confident that these significant problems have been solved and won't recur?
- The finding of “odorous” “clinical and related waste” and waste that included “anatomical waste and cytotoxic waste” that had been “stored at the Premises for several months” supports residents claims of offensive odours from this plant. It is outrageous that this plant had been operating without appropriate management systems to prevent this build up of waste likely to impact workers, nearby residents and businesses.
- How can we be confident that there are sufficient policies, procedures, training and security in place to prevent a recurrence of the disastrous fire of November 2021, which closed the local high school for 2 days and left residents sealed in their own homes?

Alarming array of toxic and hazardous wastes to be treated and ill-defined treatment processes

- Approximately 40 different waste types have been identified in Table 4.2 of the EIS. The community have to trust that the EPA will be going through this list with a fine toothed comb, and ensuring that proper systems are in place for identifying, labelling, storing and appropriately treating these wastes. It is of concern to the community to see wastes containing dangerous substances like PFAS, PCBs, toxic substances like arsenic, cyanides, isocyanates, mercury, even “highly odorous organic chemicals” being stored so close to residences. Residents near the high school already complain about the smell – they certainly don’t want to be subjected to the whiff of rotten cabbage or garlic from mercaptans.

- Are there even sufficient storage bays to store 40 different waste types separately? Or are we going to see a repeat of the situation before the fire, when many materials were stored outside buildings, together when they should be separated, unlabelled, in unbunded areas?
- The community of Rutherford put up with terrible smells from the Truegrain Waste Oil Facility for years, along with illegal dumping of wastes into sewers and creeks. The Kurri community does not want to see a repeat of this debacle!
- It is proposed to accept hazardous substances such as PFAS - PFAS are substances which have historically been used in firefighting and other industrial applications. Weston Aluminium has proposed to accept 100-200 tonnes of PFAS containing substances per annum for storage and consolidation. A range of animal studies conducted have linked PFAS exposure to negative health outcomes. PFAS is highly mobile and can travel far from its original source if it enters groundwater or waterways. We don't want a repeat of the Williamtown PFAS debacle in Kurri either!

I urge you to recommend against approval of this project due to the potential negative impacts on the environment and communities of Kurri Kurri and Weston.