

## BACKGROUND MEDIA BRIEFING

**ISSUE: A major push is underway in Australia to establish a ‘waste to energy’ incineration industry under the guise of ‘renewable energy’ to attract government subsidies and community support to burn waste.**

**Important date:** 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017 ‘No Western Sydney Incinerator Public Meeting’. Erskine Park Community Hall, 57 Peppertree Drive, Erskine Park NSW. Jane Bremmer from NTN is making a presentation at this forum.

- Generating energy while incinerating waste is a seductive idea. It appears to solve two problems at once. It promises to provide a solution to diminishing landfill space and the ever-growing mountain of generated waste, while at the same time producing much needed ‘renewable’ energy.
- But a closer look at the industry and the technology behind it reveals it to be a highly polluting industry, producing some of the dirtiest and climate negative energy around. Countries that previously embraced it are rapidly moving away from it.
- Incineration has been a dirty word in Australia for decades. Like nuclear power, it’s something we’ve largely avoided. The demolition of the Waterloo incinerator in Zetland Sydney in the 1990s was an iconic moment that made way for the Green Square development, signaling an end to industrial era polluting stacks belching out toxic pollution all over the community.
- In the interim, the incineration industry has been busy re-branding itself. Instead of incineration they now use terms such as ‘thermal treatment’, ‘mass combustion’ and ‘gasification’, which obscure the reality that the technology is still incineration, albeit one that promises less pollution than it did in the past. Add in the prospect they can now generate ‘energy from waste’ and it becomes even more blurred.
- The industry sees new prospects in Australia (and Asia). The industry has attracted political support with policies being adopted by state governments<sup>1</sup> and networking forums have recently been taking place.<sup>2</sup>
- There are [major policy changes currently taking place in the EU](#) where member states are being urged to place a moratorium on new incinerators and phase out old incinerators in response to the recognition that waste incinerators undermine more effective waste management and the recycling industry. They also continue to ignore [the international failure](#) of the claimed ‘new, innovative waste to energy incinerator technologies’ that they are approving.
- Nearly every state in Australia is actively considering waste to energy incineration proposals and pilot projects are taking place. Five facilities are already approved in WA, at least 2 proposed for NSW, 1 in ACT and potentially more in Victoria and Tasmania.
- The proposed facility for Eastern Creek NSW has been promoted as the biggest facility in the Southern Hemisphere. The proponent for this project has an interesting background in the waste industry that needs investigation.

<sup>1</sup> NSW Energy from Waste Policy Statement (2015)  
<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/epa/150011enfromwasteps.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Waste to Energy Forum (2017): <http://aien.com.au/wteforum/program/program/>

- The community will help fund these expensive facilities through subsidies and feed in tariffs from the [Clean Energy Finance Corporation](#), [Australian Renewable Energy Agency](#), and they come at the expense of proven renewable energy projects such as wind, solar, and wave energy.
- Substantial investments in facilities mean contracts to supply the 'waste fuel' will be locked in for decades and will be at the expense of sustainable waste management options and genuine renewable energy.
- There is a critical need for independent scrutiny with full public involvement in the discussion about this controversial industry. There is also an urgent need for development of sustainable zero waste solutions for Australia's waste management.

#### **DEVELOPMENTS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

##### **Eastern Creek, NSW**

[The Next Generation NSW Pty Ltd](#) have submitted to the NSW EPA for assessment a Mass Combustion MSW incinerator claimed to be the largest in the southern hemisphere. The project claims to be able to process 1.35 million tonnes of waste. Despite no information provided on the exact amount of energy that will be produced Next Generation claim to deliver a net positive Greenhouse Gas effect, eliminating some 1.5 million tonnes of CO2 per annum.

More than 70% of those who made submissions to the NSW EPA did not support the project. Strong community opposition exists, including [local government health authorities](#) that have warned the project risks years of concerted environmental protection policy to reduce the impacts of air pollution in the urban centres.

##### **Lithgow, NSW**

[Plans by Energy Australia](#) to retrofit a coal-fired power station to convert non- recyclable wastes to generate Refuse Derived Fuel have progressed through to a feasibility study due in mid- 2017. [Conservation groups have declared their opposition to the project.](#)

##### **FOY Fuel Refinery at Hume, ACT**

The FOY Group (FOY) is a mining company proposing to build a plastic to fuel facility. The company proposes a 200 tonne/day processing plant. The feedstock for plastic to fuel processing facility will comprise shredded waste polystyrene, polyethylene and polypropylene. The plastic will yield approximately 65% diesel, 20% petrol and 15% LPG (by mass).

The ACT government has established an Inquiry Panel to review the proposal and report on the findings to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. The panel has asked for any additional submissions to be provided by **10 April 2017**.

EIS: [http://www.planning.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/918983/EIS-WPTF.pdf](http://www.planning.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/918983/EIS-WPTF.pdf)

Community concern: <http://www.noplasticstofuel.com>

##### **Western Australia**

Despite more than a decade of community opposition in WA to waste to energy incinerators, the WA EPA released their [Report and recommendations of the Environmental Protection Authority and the Waste Authority, Environmental and health performance of waste to energy technologies, Advice of the Environmental Protection Authority to the Minister for Environment under Section 16\(e\) of the Environmental Protection Act 1986, Report 1468, April 2013.](#)

This report was based on the work of UK consultants, WSP environmental who investigated the health and environmental impacts of Waste to energy incinerators around the world concluding that [there was little evidence of health impacts related to newer more modern plants.](#)

##### **Eastern metro region**

In 2000 the Eastern Metropolitan Region began a process to establish a Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in the Perth Hills, home to the Darling Scarp and effectively the lungs of the city. Some 17 years later this RRF is still not established. With [EPA approval for two technologies](#) based on their concept rather than an exact technology – ie Anaerobic Digestion and Gasification – the community after nearly 2 decades, still has no resource recovery facility while the regions waste continues to be landfilled in a location that is leaching groundwater contamination into the neighboring National Park.

In addition the [EMRC have approval for a wood waste to energy biomass pyrolysis plant](#). The location of this facility is close to many residents, schools and other major pollution sources, such as the states brickworks industry, 2 major airports and state highways. Community opposition has been fierce but has not moved the EMRC or state government. Although approved, the plant is yet to be built.

### **Southern metro region**

In September 2015 the WA EPA approved the [Kwinana Waste to Energy Project](#). The project is to build and operate a [Mass Combustion waste to energy technology](#), with the help of International mass combustion incinerator heavy weights -Covanta Energy - who have now established an office in WA and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. The \$400 million plant will create 32 MW of electricity per year from 400 000 tonnes pa of residual waste. The plant will also take C&D and C&I waste streams.

Just a couple of kilometres away in neighbouring suburb of Rockingham, [the WA EPA and Environment Minister approved the New Energy Waste to Energy Gasification plant](#). This project [received \\$50 million in loans from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation](#) to help establish the project. However, recently in response to the company's inability to secure sufficient and appropriate feed-stocks, [New Energy have resubmitted their approved project to the EPA for amendment](#), to change the technology from Gasification to Mass Combustion. We await the outcome of our appeal to the EPA to have the project reassessed in full. It is not known whether New Energy will be required to pay back the CEFC loan for the project it is no longer pursuing.

These two projects represent a significant additional threat to the health and amenity of the South Metro region due to both projects being located so close to each other. This region already suffers the disproportionate impacts of industrial pollution where the state's major heavy industries are located including chemical manufacturing and metal smelting. The location is also close to the pristine Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, Seal and Penguin Islands – a sanctuary for Little Penguins.

### **Pilbara region**

In May 2013 the [WA EPA and Environment Minister approved the Boodarie Waste-to-Energy and Materials Recovery Facility, Port Hedland](#). The Gasification incinerator can take up to 225 000 tonnes of waste which includes permission for MSW, C&D, C&I, Green waste, tyres and conveyor belts, waste oils, oily water and solvents. The incinerator project is located in the states prime mining, and extractive industrial area to the north of Perth where average temperatures of more than 42 degrees are reached often and the region is subject to seasonal cyclones and flooding. The risk of hazardous and toxic industrial and mining wastes entering the plant, is a significant and real cause for concern given the difficulty of regulatory compliance monitoring in such a remote location and the known toxic air pollutants associated with the combustion of hazardous and toxic mining wastes.

Given that New Energy have applied for a change of technology for their East Rockingham project, it is unclear why the company would pursue that same unproven Gasification technology at this remote industrial location in the far northwest of WA.

### **Indian Ocean Territories**

The Indian Ocean Territories are governed by the Australian government with a service agreement for the regulation of industrial projects through the Western Australian Department of Environment and Regulation.

The Cocos Keeling Islands (CKI) and Christmas islands have both recently been granted approval for incinerators through amendments to existing industrial licences. These incinerators have not been afforded any Environmental Impact Assessment process normally required for any classified prescribed premises in WA or also as a requirement under the EPA report 1468 – Guidelines for the approval of waste to energy incinerators.

While the incinerators for the CKI include a bio-medical waste and a MSW incinerator, the WA DER has issued a [licence](#) for the facility which does not include any reference to required APC equipment, air emissions limits for public health protection nor monitoring for dioxins or furans. Similarly at Christmas Island, a hazardous waste incinerator has been granted also through [a licence amendment for an existing operation for Phosphate Resources Ltd, Christmas Island](#). There are also no air emissions limits for public health protection.

Yet in 2009 the Australian Government commissioned the report - [Climate Change Risk Assessment for the Australian Indian Ocean Territories, Cocos \(Keeling\) Islands and Christmas Island, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department](#).

This investigation concluded that both islands were very exposed to the impacts of climate change. Including sea level rise and inundation and storm surge.

We are deeply concerned that these remote islands could become hazardous waste incineration hotspots. Recently plastic marine debris was openly burned with the oversight of the WA DER. It certainly begs the question as to whether the WA DER has the expertise and leadership to provide the necessary regulation of the waste incineration industry in Australia and within the Indian Ocean Territories.

#### **Conclusion**

The National Toxics Network is calling for the Australian Government to uphold their commitment to the [International Stockholm Convention](#) to reduce and eliminate all sources of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). Waste incineration is one of the prime sources of POPs generation (dioxins and furans). NTN wants an end to all MSW waste to energy incineration in Australia and an immediate implementation of safer, proven and more cost effective zero waste strategies.

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