

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### The Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Infrastructure in Victoria

Sunbury – Thursday 7 May 2026

#### MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

Richard Welch – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Gaelle Broad

Katherine Copsey

Moira Deeming

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

**WITNESSES**

Alison Medforth,

Adam Bremner, and

Sarah Notaro, No Sunbury Waste Incinerator; and

Dan Kenney, President, Sunbury Clean Future Inc.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Development and Expansion of Waste-to-Energy Infrastructure in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast and of course in the public gallery today. You are all very welcome at this public hearing of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. When the hearing commences, I need to emphasise that this is considered a formal proceeding of the Parliament. While your attendance is welcome, to listen, any disruptions could lead to the hearing being closed down. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with that.

I will now call on committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Mr Ettershank.

**David ETTERS SHANK:** Hi. My name is David Ettershank. I represent Western Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council.

**The CHAIR:** Georgie Purcell. I represent Northern Victoria and chair the committee.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Hi. I am Gaëlle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria too.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Morning. Tom McIntosh. I represent Eastern Victoria Region.

**The CHAIR:** We do have some members who are joining us on the screen today, and we will kick off with Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

**Moira DEEMING:** Moira Deeming, also a Member for Western Metropolitan Region.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you. Thank you so much for appearing before us today. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, could you please all state your full name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of. We will start down here with Ms Notaro.

**Sarah NOTARO:** Hi. My name is Sarah Notaro, and I am part of the No Sunbury Waste Incinerator group.

**Adam BREMNER:** Adam Bremner, No Sunbury Waste Incinerator.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Alison Medforth, No Sunbury Waste Incinerator.

**Dan KENNEY:** Dan Kenney, Sunbury Clean Future Incorporated.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. We now welcome your opening comments. We do ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions, which I am sure there will be a lot of. It is fine if you go slightly over; we will just limit our question time because we are on hard 1-hour blocks. I am not sure if you have spoken among the panel about how you plan to manage those submissions, but please feel free to kick off.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I will be speaking on behalf of No Sunbury Waste Incinerator. I was told that we had 5 minutes, so we are going to be well under that 10 to 15.

**The CHAIR:** That is even better.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Hello to the esteemed members of the committee, and welcome to our beautiful town of Sunbury. It means a lot to us that you have come all the way out here today or are joining us online. As I said, my name is Alison Medforth. I am joined by Adam Bremner and Sarah Notaro, and we are here representing the community advocacy group No Sunbury Waste Incinerator as well as being members of the Victorian Anti-Incinerator Alliance.

I grew up in Sunbury. My parents moved here when I was just a month old. Before that they lived in Maribyrnong near the buzzing powerlines and the military base there. However, after my sister, who was less than two at the time, was diagnosed with an exceedingly rare skull tumour, they thought that moving to Sunbury, with its rolling hills and fresh air, would be much safer. Unfortunately, in recent years it has been made clear that this is no longer the case.

The people of Sunbury have really rallied around this cause. We started this campaign less than a year ago with a handful of people in a cafe, and we have rapidly grown to hundreds attending our community meetings and thousands of followers on our Facebook group. We got over 3000 signatures on our petition against the Sunbury waste incinerator proposal and thousands more on the call for legislation banning waste incinerators in Victoria. The community has come together in a way that has been truly humbling to me to make their message heard: that we the people of Sunbury say no to waste incineration. We understand that we have a waste problem, and waste incineration seems to be a quick and convenient solution. We should not, however, be rushing into a commitment with waste incineration projects without adequately addressing the long-term public health, environmental and community impacts in a meaningful and publicly accountable way. These incinerators, even the modern state-of-the-art ones following Europe's best practices, have recently been shown to still produce and release environmental contaminants including PFAS, microplastics and dioxins. The adverse health impacts associated with this tend to have long latency periods, making it far too early to say that these incinerators are now safe for communities.

There is also a very clear pattern as to where these waste incinerators are located: in working-class communities. In the UK low-income communities were 10 times more likely to have a waste incinerator, and 80 per cent of those operating in the US are located in lower income communities. This pattern is clearly followed in the locations of these proposals in Victoria: all in traditionally working-class towns. This raises serious concerns about environmental and social justice. Sunbury and Bulla in particular can also be classed as environmental justice communities bearing a disproportionate burden of environmental pollution and the associated health risks. A key purpose of any government is to protect their citizens, and those living in communities like Sunbury and Bulla and any other community with such a proposal deserve this too, rather than being continuously treated as a dumping ground for the state's waste.

While working on this campaign it has been very disheartening to repeatedly hear members of our community saying that this is a done deal. Many people have seen this project as going ahead regardless of our concerns, from the moment that HiQ announced their plans. The community consultation process for these types of projects has not served communities. For a clear example of this we need look no further than the approval for HiQ to take the contaminated West Gate Tunnel soil. In an Ombudsman investigation it was found that, while the science was sound, the EPA did not give any consideration to relevant human rights, giving credence to the notion that the EPA serves the government and major corporations rather than communities and the environment. The EPA reportedly even told the Ombudsman that consulting with the community would be, and I quote, 'a waste of time'. Community consultation as it is currently practiced is nothing more than a check-

box exercise. Corporations and government agencies inform communities of their plans but take no action based on community feedback.

The constant need for waste to burn by incinerators will prevent Victoria from ever truly moving towards waste minimisation and will undermine the circular economy. Instead of investing in this harmful technology we can focus on reducing consumption, improving recycling infrastructure and educating the public about sustainable practices. We can create new industries, generate green jobs and build a more sustainable future for all of Victoria. Our primary request is for the committee to recommend a legislative ban on waste-to-energy incineration and thermal waste-to-energy facilities in Victoria. We urge the committee to carefully weigh the words of those with a financial stake in allowing waste incineration to take hold in Victoria. They are dangling the false promise of a quick and easy solution to our problems, but we will find ourselves stuck on their hook for decades to come if we are lured in. Thank you very much. We are very happy to answer all of your questions.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. Members, we will start with around 5 minutes each. I do not have my timer in this hearing room.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** He is from a different group.

**The CHAIR:** Oh, yes. Sorry, I thought it was for the whole group. Of course, please go ahead. There is one more submission.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** No, of course. Thank you.

**Dan KENNEY:** Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Dan Kenney. I am president of Sunbury Clean Future Incorporated, which I will refer to as SCF. We are a Sunbury association that monitors thermal waste-to-energy decisions and promotes lawful, transparent and accountable environmental decision-making in Victoria. I have lived in Sunbury for eight years with my partner and our twin girls, but my evidence today is not personal. It is document based and directed to the integrity of the cap licence allocation process. The cap allocation is the gateway decision to Victoria's thermal waste-to-energy rollout. It is where policy becomes licenced capacity granted to specific operators. On 17 August 2025 Recycling Victoria granted 2.35 million tonnes per year of thermal waste-to-energy capacity to seven operators. That decision now determines which projects gain momentum, which communities are affected and how much residual waste may be committed to incineration for decades.

At the centre of this issue is a simple question: what evidence supports these allocations to these specific operators? Since October 2025 SCF has tried to obtain the allocation records through multiple FOI requests to Recycling Victoria and EPA Victoria. On 23 April 2026 I wrote to the head of Recycling Victoria requesting clarification for this hearing. To date, Recycling Victoria has not produced the records. Parliament has also requested the same records. On 29 October 2025 the Legislative Council ordered the production of each cap licence application and Recycling Victoria's final report or similar documents explaining the calculations and rationale behind each allocation. The government did not produce those records by the deadline of 28 November 2025. Instead it tabled a letter from the Attorney-General stating that more time was needed. On the public record, this continued non-production is unusual and serious. These are not peripheral documents. They are the core records needed to test the gateway decision. Without them the public cannot know whether the statewide rollout rests on statutory reasoning or on Recycling Victoria's website statements.

That uncertainty is consequential because a lawful cap does not automatically ensure lawful allocations. A cap may be properly modelled at system level and still be wrongly applied at allocation level. If the allocations are noncompliant, the statewide rollout cannot be treated as compliant. That distinction is critical. A cap is not protective merely because a system limit has been set. It is protective only if the allocations under it keep thermal waste-to-energy within a genuinely residual role. That in turn depends on how capacity is granted. If each applicant and each volume meets the statutory requirements, the cap functions as the intended restraint, but if too much capacity is granted too early, the cap is reduced to a delivery target. The total remains below the limit, but the allocated capacity becomes, in effect, a delivery pipeline for operators.

Recycling Victoria's decision to grant 94 per cent of the statewide cap in the first round does not by itself prove that delivery logic overrode statutory restraint, but it does place serious evidentiary pressure on the allocation records. Recycling Victoria must show, applicant by applicant and volume by volume, why that level of capacity is justified under the law. That scrutiny is especially necessary because Recycling Victoria holds dual roles. In its statutory gatekeeper role it applies statutory criteria, monitors compliance and decides who receives cap capacity. In its delivery role it supports market development, investment certainty and implementation of the thermal waste-to-energy framework. That is an inherent institutional conflict. Again, this does not prove the allocations are unlawful, but it does mean Recycling Victoria's website statements should not be accepted at face value.

The solution is simple: SCF asks the committee to require Recycling Victoria to produce the operator-specific allocation records before the statewide rollout becomes expensive to unwind and practically irreversible. At present the public is being asked to accept a high-impact decision affecting tens of thousands of Victorians without independent verification. If the statutory criteria have been applied, the records should show it. If the records do not show it, then this is not a local issue. It is a statewide failure point. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Members, I do not have my timer, but we will go for 5 minutes each. I am going to start one on my phone, so you can listen out for the noise. And just to our witnesses: the 5 minutes is pretty tight, so if you want to get more out, briefer answers will allow more questions. We will kick off with Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you. Excuse me, I am losing my voice today too. Thank you very much for your being here today, and we have got a very big audience today too, so thank you for your participation in this inquiry. My first question: your submission goes a bit to Victoria. How does it compare to other states and other jurisdictions?

**Dan KENNEY:** Victoria is accelerating toward thermal waste-to-energy, whereas the other states seem to be banning it or backing away from it. That is just my general observation, and I think it is quite interesting that the other states placing moratoriums and bans, but Victoria is the only state that seems to be going in the opposite direction. That is quite curious, I think.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I am just interested as well, from the other members of our panel: are you against all waste-to-energy because you are part of the alliance?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** We are against all waste-to-energy incineration in Victoria, yes.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. So it is not specific to concerns about it being close to residents in the area?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I do not think that there is anywhere that is far enough away from residents. While we are representing Sunbury specifically, everywhere considers their home their home and needs to protect it, unless you can find somewhere that is incredibly far away from everyone, which I do not think exists unless it is literally in the middle of the desert, and that is just impractical to actually achieve.

**Adam BREMNER:** We are very opposed to it being in Sunbury, but we do not feel like it being not in Sunbury. We could not justify us then placing it in someone else's community. So we are opposed to it completely in Victoria and in Australia.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. You mentioned community consultation. Can you expand on what that process looked like, if at all?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Can you elaborate on which section of the community consultation you are asking about? Do you mean the EPA, like licensing, or what HiQ has done so far?

**Gaelle BROAD:** I am interested to know what direct communication you have had with the company involved. But also our perspective on the committee – we are all different political parties here, but we will be making recommendations to the government, and the government gets the opportunity to respond. But your insights into that community consultation from a government perspective or the EPA would be helpful for us to know as well.

**Adam BREMNER:** We have had no consultation at all. There have been two seminars that HiQ has started, but they were very barely what we would call consultation. They were more information or propaganda sessions where they were just really telling us what was going to happen. There was no back and forth between. There were opportunities to ask questions, but it was more them justifying their position as opposed to being receptive or taking on any feedback. So they would not be in any way or in any form what we would call consultation. I am a teacher, so we do a lot of work, and our EBA specifically talks about what consultation means, and it talks about sitting down and having a genuine back and forth. But there was not any sort of that. The most we got out of it was a fact sheet at the end where our questions were answered, but they were just justifications of where they saw how they fit in with what we were saying. They were not actually considering our concerns. There were two consultations that they had, and they were both online and there was not a huge amount of warning beforehand. Besides those two, there have not been any other consultations with any government bodies. And one of the things that has also been really concerning is, when we have brought it up with different groups or different government bodies, we have hit a roadblock because there actually has not been an application. So what we hear from HiQ or from different government agencies is they will say, 'Well, what application? There isn't an application.' So we cannot actually oppose anything because there is nothing to oppose. A lot of the work that we have done in raising community concerns, and even this inquiry, which is so wonderful, has been really on the backs of the community bringing this forward, through the petition work and from individual members of Parliament who have realised the community's concern. But without the community actually raising up themselves, none of this would have happened. This would have just been business as usual. The consultation came completely from us, but it was no actual process that was in place to actually listen to our concerns.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Do you feel, if it does come down to having to wait for an application to be submitted, that it is too late at that point?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I would definitely agree with that sentiment. Once it has gone to the application point as well –

**Gaelle BROAD:** You can finish. It just means I cannot ask any more questions.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I have lost my train of thought. It has gone.

**Adam BREMNER:** If it gets to that point where the application is in process, and we have just heard news from HiQ that they are finalising the EPA application, that is a real blow for us, because that tells us that a lot of the work that we have done as a community to try and intervene is really difficult. That means it has already been taken out of our hands because we know that with the consultation that happens from now, we are powerless. This is completely in the hands of external bodies that do not consider us, and we feel like our input is so insignificant compared to the power and weight and financial backing that HiQ has, which carry so much more significance than our concerns.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have something you want to add?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I think it just goes back to what I said in the opening statement: once it gets to, for example, the EPA, there is a very common thought that the EPA is there to tick the boxes for the major corporations and for the government, and the little guys, the communities, are not really taken into account.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much. We will go to Dr Mansfield now, who I should have said from the beginning will be subbing in for Ms Copey for this entire inquiry.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, and thank you for appearing today and for your very detailed submissions. Alison, I might start with you. The new facilities, we are told, will operate at much higher standards with lower toxic emissions than the old sorts of facilities. How assured are you by those claims?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I am not at all assured. In the following panel Jane Bremner will probably be able to speak to this much better than I can, but there have been new research and studies that have shown that these new facilities that are operating to these best of standards are still releasing environmental contamination. There was one study by ToxicoWatch that found in the area of an incinerator in the Netherlands that had been praised

as one of the best in Western Europe that one sample nearby had, I think, a PFAS or dioxin count that was 138 times higher than the legal limit. That is very concerning. And this is what we are constantly told and comparing to, that we are going to have Europe's best practices. That was Europe's best practice. So we are not at all assured by that claim that these are going to be safer and better for the environment.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** And do you trust that operators will uphold or will stick to the standards and conditions that might be placed on them by the EPA?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** HiQ has already been charged by the EPA over 30 times for breaches in their licences. When we asked about that in those two community consultation sessions, we got told it did not harm the environment. It showed a very flippant attitude towards those licences. So no, there is no community trust or faith that HiQ as a company will uphold those standards at all. That is not even just a thing for Australia. There was an article that came out last year from Croydon in London that found that the company running their waste incinerator had breached their emission standard over 900 times without reporting it for quite some time. No, we do not trust that.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** What sort of confidence do you have in the EPA to monitor and enforce standards as the regulator?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** While I believe that the current budget for the EPA has recently increased, it is still highly overburdened. I would assume that there are many breaches for many licences that have gone undetected because the EPA just does not have the capacity to find or enforce all of those breaches – so not much.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Dan, I have a question for you. You have made quite an interesting argument just around the process the government has followed or failed to follow when it comes to approving some of these new facilities. Would you say that it appears as though they have started with a target or used the cap as a bit of a target rather than doing thorough assessments of each individual application as the first step?

**Dan KENNEY:** From the outside I cannot arrive at any conclusion for certain, but there are certain factors involved that would certainly suggest that Recycling Victoria might have been acting in a delivery mode rather than as a statutory gatekeeper. I cannot conclude that for certain, but I will just give you some of the factors. We have a definite, real and urgent waste problem. Landfill capacity is running out. We have new and untested legislation, the CE Act. We have the government, which is prioritising delivery of large infrastructure projects. We have the new head of Recycling Victoria being hired a month after part 5A was enacted in law. There is a lot of pressure going on here, and it would suggest from the outside to allocate 94 per cent on the first round. It would certainly seem that the cap was just used as this target, where as long as we do not exceed it, we are fine. But that is an absolute misunderstanding of what the cap is about. The cap is there to protect the circular economy from thermal waste-to-energy. I will not say they are at odds, but they are at tension with each other. That is why the cap is so important. It has a protective function, but it looks like from the outside there was just so much pressure that they misunderstood it or – I do not know, but it needs to be looked into. The records should be examined closely. That is what I would say.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. My time is up, I think.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Dr Mansfield. Mr McIntosh.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Hi. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for all being here. Ms Broad and I were saying before this is far bigger than any inquiry we have walked into in the past, so thanks, everyone, for being here. Given the huge community turnout, I am interested to drill into what it means for residents. This room does not fill up by accident or without cause. We have looked at the EPA a bit. I just want to go back a step first and understand what is driving residents' concerns, the day-to-day concerns – sorry, I have got a bit of a cold too – and why people are turning out in these numbers with the concerns they have.

**Sarah NOTARO:** I am a mother of four, so I can speak from a parent's perspective, and also a member of the Sunbury community. I am also a local teacher. We have even got some grade 6s here. These grade 6s not only are very, very passionate, like mini activists, but all of the grade 6s and all of the grade 4s at our local school have written letters to Josh Bull and to other members of Parliament about their concerns, because they have learned about the proposed incinerator and know how close it could possibly be to their homes. Some of these children live in some of the new estates that are down the road from the proposed incinerator. Just

thinking about having an incinerator for the next 30 years, knowing that 750,000 tonnes of rubbish are going to be dumped from all over Melbourne, is very, very concerning. These kids love to ride bikes. I have got kids. My youngest is five, my eldest is 13. They love to ride bikes. Knowing that there are going to be hundreds of extra trucks on the roads every day is very, very concerning. There is a possibility that they cannot even breathe in fresh air, because we are not really sure what is going to come out of this 90-metre smokestack chimney. Even what Adam and Alison have shared about the fine particles from other incinerators, from Europe – there can be PFAS. There are so many different health concerns that we are very, very worried about. Just knowing that we could have something like that down the road – there are childcare centres, there are primary schools, there is a new secondary school campus where my son will be going literally within a couple of kilometres. I mean, anyone in their right mind, anyone with children, anyone with a family or anyone in the community would have concerns. We do not want this in our backyard. We have already spoken about the EPA. It is underfunded. We do not have trust. HiQ has been completely – there has been hardly any consultation. We do not trust them. There have been all these breaches. This is why I am here.

We are busy people. As parents, we do not have much time, but we have put so much time and effort into consulting the community, building awareness in the community and sharing it with primary school students. We are really, really concerned. People in the community have said that they will move out if this thing is built, but where are people going to go? We are in a working-class area. As Alison said, these proposed incinerators are not in an inner-city area. They are always in outer suburbs, in working-class areas. And the lack of transparency has just been really concerning. So this is why we are here. This is why we have got primary school children here. We are very, very concerned; the community is concerned.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thanks. Dan, I might come to you. As Ms Broad said, we are here to make recommendations. Given that waste is a big issue worldwide, what do you see as best practice to deal with waste, whether it is around Australia or around the world?

**Dan KENNEY:** Can I give you a long answer?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, sure.

**Dan KENNEY:** Denmark is one of the global leaders in thermal waste-to-energy technology. They have state-of-the-art facilities. You could say they are a success story in many ways, and for many years they were burning the waste of other countries. Even Denmark has started to back away from thermal waste-to-energy because it recognises that it is at odds with the circular economy, and I think that is really useful to look at.

With regard to the question of best practice, it is useful to look at how thermal waste-to-energy is at odds with the circular economy. That is why Denmark is backing away from it, even though it is a global success story in terms of this technology, and that is a very useful insight for Victoria, because the circular economy here is not a policy slogan, it is not an aspirational ideal; it is the law in Victoria since 2021. But the problem appears to be that the government has not caught up with what this new law is about, and what you have is a very entrenched policy mindset that is very focused on the logistics of waste disposal. That logic, that model – old model, you could say – is very focused on: where we should put our waste? Should we put it to landfill or export it to China, or should we burn it?

The circular economy requires a completely different way of thinking. It requires us to look at the consumption that produces the waste and to reduce it at source, and that means asking: why are we producing this waste? How can we create markets that support recycled materials and keep them in use longer? That is what the law is about, but we just do not seem to really understand it. The reason I say that is that under the circular economy Act I do not think thermal waste-to-energy is a problem at all. But you have to look at what the law says. It is a genuinely limited, highly residual role. It is under the four other higher orders. If we actually followed the law, we might have one waste-to-energy incinerator for all of Victoria. I do not know. But there seems to be a conflict between two different mindsets here. What I do not understand is how the government is okay with spending billions of dollars in thermal waste-to-energy when the law says that the other four higher orders are the priority. We should be putting all that money into the four higher orders, because they are a priority. It is very clear; the law says that. But instead we are talking about building a ring of incinerators around Melbourne that makes no sense when you look at what the law actually says. Thermal waste-to-energy is meant to have a genuinely limited residual role in the waste hierarchy. So I think it is very much that the government is trying to catch up with what the law actually says, and we are still working it out. That is my view of it.

The proof of it is that the solution we have come up with is thermal waste-to-energy, which is very much the old logistics of waste disposal. It is the old mindset, and the only thing we have to protect us from this old model, and the new way, is the cap. The cap is what protects us from the negative aspects of thermal waste-to-energy, because it tends to overexpand to lead to overcapacity – it is just the nature of it. So I think if we all just read through the circular economy Act of 2021 carefully, the road map is clearly laid out. It is clearly laid out. It is there; it makes sense. But the way things are being implemented now does not make sense at all. It does not make any sense at all.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Ettershank, thank you.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming today, and also thank you to everyone from the community who has turned up. It is greatly appreciated. Could I ask firstly, from the No Sunbury campaign, could you give us a very brief summary of how your organisation has developed over the last 12 months?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I will start. We started out with a handful of people. We met up in a café and we essentially decided that this was an issue, at which point we made the Facebook page and slowly we started to take off. We met Adam. We started having community meetings. They started out with like 20 or 30 people in an upstairs room in the library. Then in November we held our first big community awareness meeting. We had between 400 and 500 people show up to that, so we had a huge growth there. From there, our Facebook group went from again just a handful of people to, at that point, about 2000 followers. If anyone wants to speak of where we are now –

**Adam BREMNER:** Yes, it really is a diverse group, too. We have a lot of different perspectives on why we have come together. There are people concerned with environmental issues, because of course this is a deeply environmental issue. There are people concerned with housing prices – the way this will affect our housing. This is a real cost-of-living crisis. There are people concerned with traffic noise and people concerned with just their roads. There are people concerned with the long-term future of Sunbury. Sunbury is a beautiful area. It is the gateway to the Macedon Ranges. They are concerned about the way this will change the complete feeling of the town – that it will no longer be this town that is known for its environment and its beautiful creeks, Emu Bottom and the platypus. It will turn into a town that is just a waste and industrial hub. So it has really been a coming together of all these different concerns that are based around this waste that is going to be a pollutant that will completely destroy the main aspect of this community.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Would it be fair to say that there is a level of sensitivity here in terms of previously being the dumping ground for what was a million and a half cubic metres of West Gate Tunnel waste? I believe you also had, with the EPA, some fairly bizarre attempts to rein in some of the pirate waste disposal around here. Is that also correct?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Clare Campbell is on one of your panels later. She is definitely the person to ask about that. But yes, Sunbury has had quite a few issues where we are just ‘Oh, we have this problem, let’s dump it here.’ We have had this toxic soil waste. We have had essentially a mountain of landfill at the Bulla tip, which is right next door. It gives a certain feel to the town, and we are sick of it, because as Adam said, we are a beautiful town and we deserve to be treated better than what we have been so far. And this is essentially, I think, our breaking point.

**Sarah NOTARO:** I have to say – I moved from Niddrie, the kind of Essendon area. I was renting there for a long time, and the more children I had, I was looking for an area with clean air and with bigger backyards. When I moved out here, probably about four and a half years ago, that was when I found out about the contaminated soil, and I was just absolutely disgusted. That is how I joined as well, because I thought Sunbury is just, as you said, such a beautiful town. It is the gateway to the Macedon Ranges. The fact that we have become known as a bit of a dumping ground – we have got so many beautiful families moving out here, lots of young people moving out here because it is more affordable. So to think that our town, which I love – the community is beautiful. The sporting clubs, the schools – we have got so much going for our town. I think sometimes it has not met that potential, but we have got bike tracks and we have got parks. That is why I love living here. The amount of people that I have met – they are down to earth. It really disappoints me to think that Sunbury has already become a dumping ground because of the soil, and even that was disgusting. Just to think

that it is the same company who think that they can put in an incinerator literally less than a kilometre from some of the new estates – to think that Sunbury could just be known as a dumping ground.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Okay. You talked before about that sort of ambiguity or the difficult position you are in in terms of how there is nothing to talk about until things have been lodged with the EPA, and the EPA obviously have nothing to talk to the organisation about that. I believe also that, to the degree there was any consultation from HiQ, that was when they were still talking about 250,000 tonnes, and then they got awarded a cap of 450,000 tonnes. Is that correct?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I believe the first one was when they were looking at 340,000 tonnes – I could be wrong on that number – and then I believe the second one was after they had been awarded the 750,000 tonnes.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Okay. All right. Can I fit in one more?

**The CHAIR:** One quick one.

**David ETTERS HANK:** You put in a petition remarkably quickly – it is fabulous – which basically asked for the minister to hold off making a decision until such time as this committee had finished its inquiry. I believe you have received now or we have received a response from Minister Kilkeny. Could you briefly summarise how you interpret that correspondence?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** After all of the effort that the people of Sunbury have shown, the passion, the time – several people spent hours knocking on doors here – it came across as very disrespectful. It was just a hand wave of ‘No, we’re not going to pay attention to this at all – business as usual.’

**Adam BREMNER:** Every signature is 10, 15, 30 minutes worth of work. So 2000, 3000 signatures is tens of hundreds of hours worth of community work.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** 3264.

**Sarah NOTARO:** And they have written.

**Adam BREMNER:** That is labour; that is work that people have put into it. For that to not really mean something when it means so much to us is really disheartening. It is just another part of this, where we need to keep trying to be heard. We are happy to keep trying because we will do anything we can to stop this. But we value this process so much because we know that this inquiry, the results of it – there is so much hinged on it.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We will need to move to Mrs Deeming now.

**Moira DEEMING:** Thank you. Thank you all for being here. I would just like to say that occasionally the sound has dropped out on my end, so if I do ask a question that you have already answered I apologise. We can all agree that waste management in Victoria has been a total disaster – PFAS, asbestos, the toxic soil. When I was a councillor I led the charge to challenge that in the High Court so that it would not come to Melton. Sadly, you did not have councillors that did the same thing for you in Sunbury, and it ended up with you guys. Ever since then I have been watching the absolute lack of consultation and the taking for granted of the people in that area. I totally sympathise, being a mother of four and a teacher as well, with just how distressing it is to see your house prices damaged and worry about your children’s health. The people out there have been completely traumatised, and it is an absolute disgrace. But nothing can happen without the say-so of the government, so [Zoom dropout] a waste. There is going to be an environmental cost. Even in the circular economy you have got to deal with these issues of waste. I was just wondering what you would ask for in terms of – since we do have to manage the waste in some way, even if a waste-to-energy facility was just a transitional phase, was reduced to one for Victoria or something like that – what kinds of safeguards you would like to see from the EPA and the government? Just say you had your ideal system – it was just one and it was not in Sunbury: what kinds of regulations and safeguards would you like to see?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I think that that is a much bigger question than I can provide an answer for right here and now.

**The CHAIR:** You are welcome to take that on notice.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Are we able to take that on notice?

**Moira DEEMING:** Yes, absolutely.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Thank you. We will get back to you with that answer.

**Moira DEEMING:** And I really liked you calling out accountability. I agree with you. I think that a lot of the processes in Victoria are backwards and that lots that could be made transparent, with absolutely no risk or no damage to anyone, except perhaps politically to certain parties, could be released earlier. Again, what would your recommendations be for improved accountability and transparency in the consultation process for these things?

**Adam BREMNER:** I think giving voice to the community and identifying legitimate avenues for the community, throughout the process, to be involved. I think a lot of the way that the community is consulted is a very 'check the box' kind of situation. We need situations where – I think you said visibility, and I think that is a really important part of it. And I think a lot of being aware of who the people are that we are speaking to would be a really helpful process as well.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** Are we able to provide a fuller answer to that one on notice as well?

**The CHAIR:** Please, yes, absolutely.

**Moira DEEMING:** Yes, please do. Sorry, I was not trying to trip you up with any technical questions. I am just interested in making these improvements.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** It is fine. They just require a bit more thought than we have time for right now.

**Moira DEEMING:** Absolutely, that is fine. So, just saying that there was technical documentation which was shared through the environmental application process which answered your concerns regarding emissions and community safety, would you be open to accepting the facility? I totally agree with you with all your fears. I would not want to live anywhere near what you have described. I am hearing two different things from two different sides. I am not a scientist, and I think it is hard for a lot of people to work out what the real risk is. But do you feel that part of the lack of being able to see that documentation – just say your answers were allayed. Do you think that would have reduced the impact on the community? Would you be open to it there, or would you still want it out of Sunbury?

**Alison MEDFORTH:** We would still be very opposed to it for multiple reasons, one of them being the company itself, HiQ. Even if they technically did give specifications that made this the safest plant in the world, where we knew for a fact that nothing bad could happen if those specifications were followed, we have not got the trust in that company to believe that they would actually follow those specifications, that they would keep up proper maintenance or that they would calibrate their instruments correctly, which is what happened at the facility in Croydon. There is no trust for that facility, even if it was absolutely perfect, to run in this town or any other town.

**Moira DEEMING:** Great.

**Sarah NOTARO:** And actually also thinking that this incinerator would be here for the next 30 years, running 24 hours a day, seven days a week – even with extra consultation, I could not trust them either. There is absolutely no trust in HiQ. If this incinerator was approved, that would be it: we would not be able to do anything about it. So yes, absolutely no trust whatsoever. It is very permanent.

**Moira DEEMING:** Can I also have one last question, quickly – just one? You could take it on notice.

**Alison MEDFORTH:** I have a bit more to answer, if that is okay.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, very, very quickly because I am cutting myself out of questions already and we have got to finish.

**Moira DEEMING:** Yes, sure. Sorry.

**The CHAIR:** No, please. That is fine.

**Moira DEEMING:** Take it on notice, and you can answer on notice as well. My last question is: there is a lot of focus on this one company. My personal view is that it could be any company and that we just need really, really good laws, really good oversight – like a functioning EPA. And that is what I am really keen to hear about. I am not keen to, I do not know, focus on one company necessarily. I just do not want any company to be able to do the [Zoom dropout]

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Moira. We did lose you at the end there, but I think we got the gist of it.

**Moira DEEMING:** I missed that last bit. I am done. I could not hear you, though.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Apologies. We lost you as well, but I think we got the gist of it.

**Moira DEEMING:** I will just put mine in my email. Is that okay?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, that is all good. My role as Chair is to keep everything to time, so we will not be able to have questions from me, but I just want to say thank you for appearing today and congratulate you on your advocacy. I live in the Macedon Ranges myself, and I see our communities as joint Hume and Macedon, and we have a lot of work and travel and shared relationships between our communities. I have heard my own constituents talking about this issue as well, and I just wanted to congratulate you on your campaign. And thank you to everyone for remaining peaceful and respectful in the public gallery. That concludes the first hearing.

**Witnesses withdrew.**