

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

Clare Campbell;

Kate Johnston; and

Mary MacKinnon

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 various 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 in the public gallery today.

I think most of you have been here for the morning sessions, but if not, just reiterating that everyone is welcome to be here and observing today. We do not normally draw such large crowds to our public hearings. It is considered a formal proceeding of the Parliament, so if I could just request no disruptions or speaking from the public gallery as that could result in the hearing being closed down, and we would like not to do that.

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

David ETTERS HANK: Hi. David Ettershank, Western Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

Tom McINTOSH: Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Dr Mansfield?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Apologies, the audio is very sketchy. Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I believe Mrs Deeming is on a phone call, but she will be back with us soon.

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 all please state your full name and any organisation you might be appearing on behalf of.

Clare CAMPBELL: My name is Clare Campbell, and I am here as a local resident.

The CHAIR: Great.

Mary MacKINNON: My name is Mary MacKinnon. I am here as a supporter of the grassroots community campaign and a local resident of 25 years.

The CHAIR: Wonderful.

Kate JOHNSTON: My name is Kate Johnston, and I am here as a lifelong local resident.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask they are kept to around 15 minutes maximum to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Mary MacKINNON: All right. I am starting this afternoon. I am particularly concerned about all incineration, but specifically today the Bulla, Sunbury and Wildwood proposal. I would like to include Wildwood because if we have a look at a map, Wildwood is a rural area here. Emu Creek is part of the site of the Eco-Hub and the boundary for Wildwood is actually that creek, so some people in Wildwood are 400 metres away from this thing.

Sunbury is a particularly unique junction, I think, where metro meets the country. We have got abundant green spaces, Aboriginal history, vineyards, farmlets et cetera, and all are going to be subject to any cumulative irreversible toxic pollution disseminated via the plumes from any incinerator that may eventuate. My environmental concerns relate to everything that grows and breathes. Emu Creek, as I have mentioned, flows into the Maribyrnong and Yarra rivers and then out through the bay. It meanders this incinerator site to both the north and the east, so it crosses it for approximately 50 per cent of the perimeter. This creek includes native frogs, including the growling grass, water skinks and the platypus. The urbanisation in the area is pushing our kangaroos, wombats and echidnas towards this creek as their habitat shrinks.

The local population in this area could triple within the next 25 years. The Sunbury South and Lancefield PSP is a 1800-hectare site designated for 19,000 new homes, and they are largely for first home buyers who will have children now or in the future. In addition, there are 7730 homes and rolling meadows in Goonawarra. When you add the smaller populations of Wildwood and Bulla to this, we have got 71,000 people proposed to live within 1 to 5 kilometres of the proposed incinerator. Victoria is desperate for all this additional housing, but it is unacceptable that residential precincts be made unsafe for habitation. Imagine over time you cannot grow your herbs or your vegetables in your backyard. Also, this expansion in population requires a huge amount of water. This incinerator will require 6.5 million litres of water a year, and we are in an area of less than average rainfall. So I would query: where is all this extra water going to come from?

I want to give you a little scenario, because my employment history has been in accommodation. I want you to picture a bad tenant moves out or Grandma or Grandpa dies and the home has got to be cleared out. Into the bin – they should not – people throw pharmaceuticals, cleaning products, batteries, solvents, paints and the odd bicycle tyre or something like that. It goes into the 10-tonne collection truck along with mixed plastics and trash. Then it gets into the incinerator with industrial waste. This plant should process approximately 14,400 tonnes weekly of rubbish, and no-one is going to separate out the nasties. If you read the website, they say, ‘We’ll take out the nasty things you can’t burn.’ A lot of these things are so tiny. Nobody is physically going to sort through 14,500 tonnes of rubbish a week. Those trucks number around about 1440 trucks a week with waste coming in, but presumably there are also 380 trucks a week going out with ash. That is every week. The composite combustion produces by-products which are harmful to humans, flora and fauna. By the time the impacts are identifiable there are likely to be reproductive, cancerous or respiratory issues and less wildlife, and our healthy environment will be irreversibly destroyed. Thirty or 40 years ago you stopped us all from burning in our backyard incinerators. Whilst this new proposal is not Dickensian, the CO₂ and greenhouse gases may in fact exceed burning coal. A filtered stack will not capture all the micronic toxic gases, dioxins and fluorenes, and the particulates and particles that will be released daily are going to be water soluble, inhalable or carcinogenic or a combination of those three things. The bulk of them are going to fall within the local radius, and I would say the local radius is within that 1 to 5 kilometres that I have referred to today, but in a very strong wind they could possibly get as far as 50 kilometres away.

The incineration capacity is projected to be 750,000 tonnes per year, which is almost equal largest to anything proposed in Victoria. Having a look on Hume City Council’s website, the amount of rubbish generated in Hume, where this thing would be placed, is actually 92,000 at the moment, and only 20 per cent of that is domestic rubbish. It will produce toxic bottom ash at the rate of four to one. That means for every four tonnes of rubbish that is incinerated you get a tonne of ash. That is actually 187,500 tonnes of ash annually or 5.5 million tonnes of toxic ash over a 30-year plant life. I would question what could possibly be the safe use of

that quantity. It may be roading, but as others have referred to today, maybe that spreads toxicity throughout the state.

Sunbury, Bulla and Wildwood – I have clumped them all together – already have the industrial tip, the tunnel soil and a composting plant processing residential green waste for nine municipalities, and that brings trucks as well. The airport is constructing a third runway, with a fourth possible in the future. I feel this area is very much shouldering more than a fair disruptive share for Victoria. We do not wish to become a slum, and I think an incinerator would just tip us into that situation where Sunbury would become known as a slum. The compost is already causing odour complaints to an EPA which appears to be under-resourced, and I cannot possibly see that making green compost and toxic ash should be neighbours.

HiQ did incur multiple EPA breaches during their soil program, and they seem to treat fines as no more than a cost of doing business. They demonstrate no social or environmental consciousness. Their plan, if you go onto HiQ's website today, includes a new landfill where the perimeter is actually bordered by the creek – on their own map it goes right to the creek – so anything that goes in that landfill is going to also leach into this creek. It is inevitable that to maximise returns any operator will maximise to the highest capacity burning. I consider that this is a lazy and dangerous plan to burn rubbish for private profit in a residential heartland, and it certainly discourages a circular economy. Approval to incinerate will be detrimental to the life quality of the current and future generations of Sunbury, Bulla and Wildwood, for children especially. Greater Sydney and ACT have banned the incinerators, and I hope that the Victorian Parliament will support us to preserve this area's future livability and property values. I also think other Victorian communities deserve the same consideration. I thank you all for listening to us and for coming to Sunbury today.

Kate JOHNSTON: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I do appreciate it. As I said earlier, my name is Kate Johnston. I was actually born in the Sunbury hospital. I was raised here. I went to school here. My whole extended family lives here, and now my three children live here and go to school here. I have been here for 40 years and never moved. I have never once considered leaving Sunbury until now. I love this town and I hope to stay, but for the first time in my life I am actually preparing to move my family away – not because I want to but because I am very concerned about the long-term health and environmental impacts of the proposed waste incinerator. I am here today to ask you to reject not just this proposal in Sunbury but to recommend against all waste incineration more broadly in Victoria. Today I will present to you a number of reasons for my position. All of them are actually grounded in peer-reviewed research, so I will not exaggerate or overstate any claims, because I do not need to. The evidence speaks clearly enough on its own.

My first concern is around health and environmental risks. We are being told that these facilities are safe, but the evidence does not support that claim. A 2025 systematic review published in *BMC Public Health* analysing over 50 studies of populations living near waste incinerators found the following: a statistically significant increase in asthma – now, I am asthmatic and two of my three children are, and my understanding of 'statistically significant' means it is very unlikely due to chance; elevated risks of respiratory and cardiovascular disease; increased risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma; a near twofold increase in laryngeal cancer in women; and an increased risk of adverse birth outcomes, including preterm birth, low birth weight and birth anomalies. These effects are described in the literature as modest, but importantly, they are not zero. When applied across entire communities, including children, even small increases in risk matter. Based on this evidence alone, it is not scientifically accurate to claim that incinerators are safe, yet that is exactly what our community is being told. We are also told that this research relates to older facilities and that modern incinerators are different, but that argument actually reinforces my concern – it does not resolve it – because the long-term impacts of modern incinerators are actually not yet known. History has shown us that communities have repeatedly been told that certain technologies are safe, only to discover long-term harm later on with research. We have seen this with substances like PFAS and formaldehyde. So when we are told the science shows it is safe, the reality is the long-term science does not yet exist.

My second concern is around monitoring and compliance. We are told these facilities are safe because they are regulated and monitored, but real-world evidence shows that compliance does not actually equal safety. At a modern incinerator in Harlingen in the Netherlands considered state of the art and fully compliant with emissions permits, dioxin levels in surrounding soil increased sevenfold over time. Independent biomonitoring from 2025 conducted by ToxicoWatch across multiple European waste-to-energy plants had similar findings, with dioxins and PFAS detected in locally produced food, including eggs, fruit and vegetables, sometimes exceeding regulatory limits. Many of these plants were actually fully compliant with emission standards too. So

if the plants are operating legally and we are still seeing this data, that is a huge concern. This means the issue is not simply whether standards are met, it is actually whether those standards are adequate to protect communities over time. Monitoring here is periodic, so it does not capture cumulative environmental contamination. So when we are told it meets standards, that actually does not mean that it is safe.

My third concern is actually around HiQ's track record and regulatory trust. We are being asked to trust the operator and the regulatory system, but trust must be based on evidence. In July 2023 EPA Victoria laid 33 charges against HiQ relating to its operations at the same Sunbury Road site. These included improper waste management, failure to comply with remedial notices and issues with other hazardous material handling. The outcome was financial penalties of approximately \$55,000. For a company operating at this scale that is not a meaningful deterrent. It is not reasonable to expect the community to place trust in future compliance when past compliance has failed and consequences have been minimal at best.

My fourth concern is around policy reality. We know that these incinerators have been rejected elsewhere already in our own country. We are being told that it is a necessary and accepted solution, but policy decisions elsewhere are telling a very different story. In 2018 a proposed facility in Western Sydney was rejected due to uncertainty around emissions and human health impacts. In 2021 thermal waste-to-energy was effectively banned across Greater Sydney and much of New South Wales, and the ACT – and this is very interesting – has banned it outright since 2020. So the question must be asked: if this technology is considered too uncertain or risky for those populations, why is it acceptable for Sunbury or even Victoria? You do not actually need me to tell you that incinerators pose a risk, because New South Wales and the ACT have already just told you that.

My last concern is around the fact that waste does not disappear with this process, it actually just changes form. We are told that we are running out of room for landfill and this technology solves the waste problem. My first point around that is that Australia is a continent, so that is a nonsensical argument. But secondly, incineration does not eliminate waste, it just transforms it. It produces air emissions, including dioxins, heavy metals and ultrafine particles, and persistent chemicals such as PFAS, detected in flue gas, ash and wastewater, and it also has large volumes of toxic ash, which I know Mary was talking about before. For every 4 tonnes burnt, roughly 1 tonne of ash remains. Some of this is actually hazardous and requires permanent containment, so this is not a clean solution, and it does not actually solve our problem at all. It is just a redistribution of waste into more toxic forms.

Today you have the opportunity to help us and to do the right thing. The evidence does not demonstrate safety; it demonstrates uncertainty, risk and long-term consequences, so I ask you to please reject this proposal. Thank you.

Clare CAMPBELL: Chair and committee members, welcome to Sunbury, and thank you all sincerely for being here today. My name is Clare, and I have lived here for 15 years. My husband and I are raising our three boys here. You have heard many passionate words from my fellow community members today against the proposed incinerators both here in Sunbury and across Victoria. I have no doubt that you will read many, many more passionate words against incinerators in the large number of public submissions that the committee has received. While I share this passion, I thought I might instead use my opening remarks to share a little bit about this area, which the committee may find helpful in better understanding the community's commitment to the future of this place.

As the locals in the room will know, there really is something for everyone around here. For the wildlife lovers: you would delight to know that Sunbury's natural waterways, wetlands and valleys are home to many native species, including kangaroos, possums, bats, echidnas and a vast array of birds. Indeed, if you are not woken on a perfect summer's morning by the sound of your neighbour's lawnmower, you can be sure that a local magpie or a flock of corellas will do that job. A patient visitor to Jacksons Creek might even be lucky enough to spot a platypus in the wild.

For the history buffs: you will be intrigued by the charm of the oldest existing homestead constructed by settlers in Victoria. Just down the road from here sits historic Emu Bottom homestead. Constructed in 1836, it still stands today and provides a rare glimpse into the life of the early colonial days of Victoria.

For the wine lovers among us: it may surprise you to know that this area has a long and successful history in winemaking. Just 1 kilometre from where we are sitting sits Goona Warra Winery, established in 1863 by

James Francis, the ninth Premier of Victoria. Across the road from there is Craiglee winery, first planted with vines in 1863 by James Johnston, who at the time was a member of the Victorian Parliament, serving as the MP for the district of St Kilda. The economic downturn of the 1920s saw the winery become a farm until 1972, when John Brown, of the well-known Brown Brothers wines, visited the property, having been so impressed by a vintage Craiglee wine that he had been served at a Melbourne function. That visit inspired the young Pat, whose family had been operating the farm, to replant the land with vines. His award-winning wines are still sold widely today, and I believe Pat is here and will be addressing the committee shortly. So, Pat, if you are listening, I hope I have all my Craiglee facts straight.

Cricket fans may already know that the ritual of sitting down to watch the Ashes test has been shaped over the decades by a friendly match played just 800 metres from here. Indeed it was the humorous gift of a small urn of ashes presented to the visiting English cricket team by the lady of Rupertswood mansion which would go on to contribute greatly to the famous Australian–English fight to win back those ashes.

Aviation enthusiasts would be thrilled to know that just over the Calder Freeway lies the unassuming paddock that paved the way for Australia's love of flying. It was on that site in 1910 that none other than Harry Houdini made history by piloting the first successful powered flight in the country.

For the sweet tooth among us: if you have ever indulged in a pavlova covered in perfectly whipped Bulla cream or perhaps joined the kids in polishing off a box of Bulla ice creams on a summer's day, you have enjoyed a piece of local history. Just down the road from here sits the small town of Bulla, only 2 kilometres as the crow flies from the proposed Sunbury incinerator. In the same year that Harry Houdini was flying over a paddock next door, the Sloan family were establishing their cream company. It was on the lush green hills of Bulla where dairy cows grazed, their milk supplied in copper cans bearing the name of the farm's location. 116 years later one of Australia's most successful family-owned businesses still operates under the name acknowledging where it all began: Bulla.

If nature is your passion, we have what is being called here the jewel in the crown of natural grasslands. Just a stone's throw from where we are sitting is a rather remarkable and significant site. It is home to around 130 native plants, flowers and grasses that have endured on that land post colonisation to form part of the just 1 per cent of original grasslands that remain in Victoria.

Finally, for the music lovers, it was a paddock just 3 kilometres from the proposed Sunbury incinerator site where the relatively unknown band Queen and their frontman Freddie Mercury were relentlessly booed when they took to the stage at the Sunbury music festival in 1974. Attendees were there to hear real Aussie rock music, so when the British band began their performance, the crowd wound up unwittingly trying to shoo one of the most iconic bands in the world off stage.

Committee members, there is so much more about this great place that I could share with you – about the wonderful people who live here and keep our many volunteer groups running, about all our amazing sporting clubs that get our kids out playing sport every weekend, about how neighbours still look out for each other here and how parents linger at the school gates just to have a chat, about how you would struggle to get through some Saturday morning shopping without bumping into a local friend. These are just a few of the things that make us proud to call this community our home. But perhaps the most important story of this place is yet to be decided: that of our future. Committee, we ask you today and your colleagues across the aisles on Spring Street to play a positive part in securing us a safe and meaningful future.

I would like to conclude with an old saying: we have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak. On this important issue, and as you read the many public submissions you have received, I would like to thank you all for listening to our community. It is our hope that we have been heard.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. We will kick off, members, with just under 4 minutes each. I will have the timer going, and if there is extra time we will go around again. We will start with Ms Broad.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much. Who would have thought I had better come back and do a bit of tourist activities as well? Thank you very much for sharing.

Clare CAMPBELL: You are very welcome.

Gaelle BROAD: That was great. Earlier we heard from other residents, Jenny and Paul and Chris, who have been following this journey for the last 12 to 18 months. But also earlier there was some soil that had been dumped here as well. For you personally, what has this process or period been like without community consultation or the availability of more information? What pressure is it putting on you personally and on the community itself?

Mary MacKINNON: I retired last year in August as very much a senior. I am over the age of 70. I actually was aware of the toxic soil, but I was too busy to get involved in that at the time. I tripped across this incinerator proposal, and I said, 'You have got to be joking.' And I live within that 5-kilometre –

Gaelle BROAD: So how did you find out about it initially?

Mary MacKINNON: Through the community grassroots campaign. I was never aware that there was a HiQ consultation period until apparently it was finished. How they managed to email me yesterday and tell me what they were doing I do not know, because I have never had any communication with email, but I was one of the ones that got an email yesterday. All my information has either come from the grassroots campaign or from doing research. I do think it is an atrocious proposal, particularly in what is going to be a very dense residential area.

Gaelle BROAD: Can I just ask the same question to Clare and to Kate? Have you received information direct from HiQ? Where is your information from?

Clare CAMPBELL: I found out about the proposal because of the fantastic no waste incinerator group that has been working tirelessly in Sunbury. It popped up on Facebook, and initially I thought, 'What's this about?' I went along to one of their public meetings, which was just upstairs in the library. I went in quite open-minded and was quite appalled by the time I walked out at just the entire proposal. Had it not been for the group, the grassroots campaign of local community members who take time away from their families and their jobs and their hobbies to inform the community, I would have found out about it driving down the road and seeing a smokestack being constructed on Sunbury Road, which is deeply concerning. I am quite engaged in local politics. I spend way too much time on social media and watching the news, and I only found out about it because of the community members that were out there doing what they could to spread the information. I did not know that HiQ had a consultation period. Had I known, I would have very much liked to participate in that process. But by the time I even found out about the proposal, that process had completely finished.

Gaelle BROAD: I am interested in that residual waste and what you consider to be the options in the communications that you have had or the information that you have found. I remember visiting an organic facility and they had rows of soil, all the fencing up, but it was full of rubbish because people had put the wrong thing in the wrong bin. I have also spoken with others that have been overseas and seen some of the plants that have the AI sorting facility to try and take out as much as can be recycled, but then that always leaves things – I think a bed mattress or something. What conversations are you having? Are there any alternatives that you think it would be useful for us as a committee to look into?

Kate JOHNSTON: I think a better bins process – more options – would be amazing. I know we have three bins, but the system is not managed well. If you get a piece of rubbish, sometimes you know that it is not something you should throw in the actual waste bin, but there is no other option for you to use, so it ends up going in the general waste.

Gaelle BROAD: Also, one person in the street putting the wrong thing in can actually ruin that whole –

Kate JOHNSTON: Yes. I have heard of whole recycling collections going straight into landfill because the process was not managed properly.

The CHAIR: We will go to Dr Mansfield – if you are there.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I am, and please bear with me. There is no video of what is happening at your end. [Zoom dropout] potential health impacts on yourselves, your families and communities. I am interested – I asked previous residents this: what do you think of assurances that are provided by the proponent about the safety and the monitoring of this facility in Sunbury or these facilities generally and also the EPA's ability to monitor and enforce any safety standards that are applied?

Kate JOHNSTON: Sorry, I missed the start of the question, but were you asking whether or not we have confidence in –

Sarah MANSFIELD: EPA and the proponents with their claims, because they have obviously got to self-monitor, a lot of these emissions, and comply with standards.

Kate JOHNSTON: I did spend a portion of my opening speech talking about the fact that history has shown us that we actually cannot trust the organisation and the monitoring process was clearly ineffective, so no, I do not personally have any trust in that at all.

Clare CAMPBELL: If I can also answer your question, Dr Mansfield, I would say it is the equivalent of putting the fox in charge of the henhouse in terms of what this community expects of HiQ and, unfortunately, the EPA. I came to learn about this issue at pretty much the exact same time last year that in my very immediate neighbourhood my street and my neighbours on the adjoining street had the misfortune of a rogue operator opening an illegal tip at the end of our street. I know Mr Ettershank is nodding because he is aware of this. For a number of months we had the living hell of living next door to an illegally operated dump operated by someone who had zero regard for the community that he was, frankly, traumatising. In that time we made countless attempts to involve every single authority that we could possibly think of that could assist us in shutting the illegal tip down. Of course the EPA was one of the most frequently contacted bodies. Photos, videos were sent – emails, eyewitness reports. It took many, many, many months for them to proactively visit the site. They spent about 15 minutes there, they wrote him a fine and they left. It was at the same time that that was happening that I became aware of this proposal, and it does sadden me to say that my faith in the EPA is zero. My faith in this operator to hold themselves accountable when the aim of the game is to run a profitable business – zero.

Sarah MANSFIELD: That is not a dissimilar story to the community near where I am, in Lara. I have had very similar issues. You spoke about some penalties for breaching any standards or requirements. Do you think that they are a significant enough deterrent for these companies?

Clare CAMPBELL: No. We have genuinely seen that proven.

Mary MacKINNON: I think they budget for it to be a cost of business. That is just how it is. We live in a corporate world these days where OH&S is about not getting caught.

Clare CAMPBELL: If I can just add to that, I am curious as to what price the EPA puts on the health and wellbeing of my community. A \$10,000 fine does not compensate a chronically ill asthmatic child, nor does a \$100,000 fine, nor does a million-dollar fine. I do not have a dollar amount that I would put on the health and wellbeing of the children that live in this community.

Kate JOHNSTON: Can I just add one more thing before we move on? Clare made me think of this just now. The fact that it is a business designed to be profitable means it is already compromised. The outlay of this project is, what, almost a billion dollars. They will want to make their money back, and they will try anything, I would feel, to make sure they get their money back. I think that makes it even harder to trust because as soon as money is involved we know that people become compromised.

The CHAIR: That was time, Dr Mansfield, but thank you so much. We will now go to Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you. Mary, I think you just said before that you have got three bins here.

Mary MacKINNON: Yes.

Tom McINTOSH: I just did a quick google, because I had not actually thought about this, but the council, just in my google, said that they are pushing against introducing a fourth bin. A lot of today's conversation has been around a solution focus: what do we need to do? It is about how we deal with our waste, sorting and all this sort of stuff. I am sorry to put you on the spot with this, but do you have opinions about a fourth bin if we are talking about better use and less waste?

Mary MacKINNON: Well, a fourth bin would be glass, and we know that glass is reusable. I am old enough to know when soft drinks and milk came in glass bottles that were constantly reused. Because it is more expensive, I think that any solution that is not an incinerator is going to cost money. Part of the education

program will be that it is going to cost residents a little bit more, it is going to cost businesses a little bit more. It is a very simplistic thing to say that the best way to eliminate rubbish is not to make it in the first place. We have to look at packaging and what packaging is made of, and there have got to be some regulations around that. I could give you some trite examples, but it really would not be hard to reduce the amount of rubbish we make by 15, 20 per cent. It would not take a lot of thought, but it does take a lot of will and it will probably take some money, and that may be the cost of not having an incinerator.

Clare CAMPBELL: I would agree that any other solution is a great start. In the current climate of finding new things to tax, I am amazed the government does not have a plastic tax. I find it astonishing that when I go into the grocery store and I want one tomato I have to buy six wrapped in plastic. Why is that allowed? We took away people's plastic bags at the supermarket and people adjusted, and now you never hear about it anymore. They bring their canvas bags, and that is the end of it. I cannot understand why producers of these products are not being more heavily penalised and that money is not being reinvested into ways to figure out how to reduce these products. We should be able to get our fruits and vegetables not wrapped in anything. We should be able to have labels – you know, we have health stars on our food; why can't we have more clear regulations about which product out of these three uses the most recycled packaging? Consumers want those options, but if they are not available – the initiative comes from the top down, and it is our parliamentarians that have the power to look at these things in more detail: what is the long-term plan? What are we going to do for the next 50 years to reduce the burden on everyday people to figure out how to reduce their own consumption, when sometimes in the grocery store the only option is to buy the fruit wrapped in plastic?

Tom McINTOSH: Just with 'Think global, act local', like, say, with the Hume Council – I just did a google; I presume it is true – leading the charge against the fourth bin, would you advocate the council to have a fourth bin, even if it costs you a little bit more as a ratepayer?

Clare CAMPBELL: Yes. When the green bins were first introduced, they were optional and they were added to your rates, and it gave those who were very proactive and informed the option to make that decision to add that bin to their property. That carried on for a period of time, and then it became a compulsory thing. So I think you can do things in baby steps and in a more palatable way that is not thrust on the community, causing frustration. But why not trial it? Why not pick one small part of Hume and give them all a fourth bin and, based off evidence, see how well it is received and how well it is used? We really look to councils and people such as you to spearhead these kinds of things.

Tom McINTOSH: It is being rolled out across the state, but Hume council is refusing to adopt it; I presume because of cost. I am not overly across it, but I think it is an interesting part of this conversation. If we are talking about waste, again just a google I did talked about glass shreds getting into paper and contaminating that, so you cannot recycle that et cetera, et cetera. For what it is worth, I agree with you on the plastics in supermarkets and how we minimise that in the first place.

Mary MacKINNON: I have got a comment to make on that. In New Zealand they have got a situation at the moment, which is voluntary – you know the onion bags you get that are meshy? You buy bags like that – and I think you can get them here, now – where you take your own bags, you put your own fruit and veggies in those, and that is a reusable bag and you can wash it as well. They have also got a container for the products from the delicatessen. Now, you have to buy the container that they tell you originally because their scales are calibrated not to charge you for the weight of the container. Interestingly, in New Zealand, the company doing that is Woolworths. It is not here, but it is being trialled over there at the moment. And many trials are done in New Zealand first because it is a smaller community but very similar.

Tom McINTOSH: Thank you.

Mary MacKINNON: But that is an idea that could be expanded.

Kate JOHNSTON: Will the incinerator cost taxpayers money anyway? Will there be some costs incurred from the construction of it anyway? Because if you are saying that Hume is worried about the cost of the bins, I am sure at some point we will be paying for the cost of the incinerator anyway. What is the difference?

Mary MacKINNON: Well, they will charge you to incinerate Hume's rubbish.

Kate JOHNSTON: Yes, so what is the difference?

Tom McINTOSH: I suppose the point I am making is investing in preventing the waste in the first place, and it sounds like through today that community are up for that, so I just want to –

Kate JOHNSTON: Yes. I feel like an incinerator is the opposite. It is actually going to disincentivise that completely because they would need a certain amount of rubbish to burn to keep it running.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McIntosh. We will go to Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Again, thank you so much for really thoughtful and well-considered representations and submissions. It is really impressive the way this community has dug in. I think we covered it with the last panel, and I think from your comments so far in terms of the question of consultation and information being pretty grossly inadequate – is that still reasonable?

Mary MacKINNON: Absolutely. It is almost non-existent.

Clare CAMPBELL: It is funny that Mary says she received the email from HiQ, because I signed up to receive emails from HiQ and I have not heard a word.

David ETTERS HANK: Me too.

Clare CAMPBELL: Yes. So I think I am blacklisted.

David ETTERS HANK: I should not have used my parliamentary email address. Can I ask: we know there is going to be a cap licence, and we have been trying to find out about that without any success. There is going to be an EPA operational licence, to which we are none the wiser. I guess there is a third kind of licence, and that is a social licence to actually operate. I would ask each of you if you could just comment on, do you think it is valid, the concept to be able to say as a community ‘no’, and do you think that there is any way in which this proposal could have a social licence?

Clare CAMPBELL: I am happy to go first. Short answer: no. I think from the get-go, and I have said this from the start of being involved with this, even if this is the most amazing, safe technology in the world and it produces electricity and it is clean and green and all of these wonderful things, if that were true, the location for this particular one in Sunbury is highly, highly unsuitable. It is 200 metres from a creek. The main access point is a bluestone bridge that was built in the 1800s. Anyone sitting in this room who has driven that particular bend down to the Bulla bridge at night when it is raining would know that you are taking your life in your hands, and that is no exaggeration. One garbage truck rollover on that street, and we can start a ‘Days since HiQ fatality’ calendar, because bringing that much waste to the facility has to be the first thought process. I am assuming they will want to run at their full capacity of 750,000 tonnes a year. That is a thousand trucks a week that need to access that site – minimum of a thousand trucks a week. They have to get there somehow, and it is on our roads, which are completely unsuitable. Perhaps if HiQ could pick up their site and be transported somewhere else where they had an industrial zone that was very well accessed and serviced by a freeway and ideally a train line, because transporting that much waste would be much more efficient if it was done in other ways, then I would be more interested in hearing about how that incinerator was going to operate. But whether it is safe, not safe, or anything in between, the location is just unconscionable. It cannot go on that site. And that should be really the first concern when it comes to that particular proposal.

David ETTERS HANK: Mary, social licence?

Mary MacKINNON: I agree exactly. It is totally the wrong location. It is not something that is suitable to be built in a residential area, safe or unsafe, and we do not believe that it will be safe. Even with the best of will in the world, every now and then all sorts of mechanical and technical things go wrong. It just cannot be where one day 100,000 people will live. It is destined to be 71,000 people now within 5 kilometres. In your lifetime, you younger ones, it will be 100,000 people living within 5 kilometres of a monster.

David ETTERS HANK: I think you and I might be closer in age than you think, actually, but anyway, thank you.

Mary MacKINNON: I doubt it.

David ETTERS HANK: Kate?

Kate JOHNSTON: I really do not have much to add to that, other than the extra fact that even if it was safe and even if there was nothing wrong with the location, you still have the factor of not preserving resources. If you always need to burn rubbish, you are losing sight of the fact that the resources producing some of these products are finite and we are burning them. I think you are missing that whole half of the picture there.

David ETTERS HANK: Chair, if I can just – one quick question. Do you know anybody, any of your neighbours, that are supportive of this as a concept?

Kate JOHNSTON: No.

Mary MacKINNON: No, no. My street is full of corflutes and bumper stickers.

Clare CAMPBELL: No, I have not heard any positive, especially once they find out that it is HiQ that wants to be the operator. That takes any shine off any open-mindedness that they may have. HiQ has a reputation in this place that they cannot recover from, so that social licence I do not think will ever exist here.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Of course. Mrs Deeming, I am not sure if we have you back or if you have any questions. No, I do not believe so. You might receive some questions on notice from Mrs Deeming, as she has for other witnesses.

We do not have long, but I might just ask one quick question. Echoing Mr Ettershank's thoughts, it is genuinely quite amazing to see a community in an area rally together like you have on this issue – and thank you for coming and speaking to us about it today. Putting aside all of the feelings about the incinerator coming to town at all, because it is clear that that is not wanted no matter what, could you just talk us through a little bit about how the community has felt about the engagement and consultation or communication from the government and department and other representatives and how that has made you feel in the town?

Mary MacKINNON: I do not think there has been any communication from the council or the state government – and it should come from the state government, because it is not a council issue. As I said, I have not had anything in my mailbox from HiQ either. Like Clare, I did not know that HiQ were attempting to do any consultation till I heard that it had already been and gone. I think with respect to members of our state Parliament, they would rather we did not know about it.

The CHAIR: Most of us are not from the government. But I am genuinely just trying to understand the consultation or lack thereof, it seems. It is clear that the community still would have landed at this position at the end of the day, but does it feel as if the almost blunt instrument approach coming into the town has heightened the angst around it?

Kate JOHNSTON: Yes, definitely. I know quite a few people who are talking about moving before it happens, so absolutely. I would say I did not have any consultation either. I found out because I was going for a run and I saw a sign in someone's front yard, and then I had to do my own research. So I feel like the communication has been non-existent.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

Tom McINTOSH: Chair, do you mind if I just say I am from the government, and without the risk of igniting the room, I must say local member Josh Bull in our caucus has been very outspoken in his opposition to this. So there is no MP, at least within the government, who is not aware of the local opposition, as were a couple of other members with other proposals around the state. I did not have a lot of knowledge about waste-to-energy before today, but I definitely knew about his opposition. I will just put that on the record.

The CHAIR: I agree with that, Mr McIntosh, and it is probably important for me to say the local member has engaged with me leading up to this inquiry and has made his views known, as I am sure he has in the community.

Mary MacKINNON: One step behind that is I think this community has engaged very loudly and very strongly with Mr Bull.

The CHAIR: Yes, and it is worked. I agree with all these sentiments. On that note, that concludes the hearing. We have run out of time, but I just want to thank you all for appearing today and for sharing your views and speaking so passionately. It is really great to get the local perspective before we dive into the other experts and departments to really get the feeling of the town, so thank you for bringing that here to us.

Witnesses withdrew.