

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

Cr Carly Moore, Mayor, and

Sheena Frost, Chief Executive Officer, Hume City Council; and

Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor, Merri-bek City Council.

The ACTING CHAIR (Tom McIntosh): 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 respect to their ancestors, elders and families. I welcome any members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

We will just get the committee members to introduce themselves, starting to my right.

David ETTERS HANK: Hello, David Ettershank. I am from Western Metropolitan Region.

The ACTING CHAIR: Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

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

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

The ACTING CHAIR: Great. I will ask the witnesses to just give their names. I will start with you, Carly.

Carly MOORE: My name is Carly Moore. I am from Hume City Council.

Sheena FROST: Sheena Frost, CEO of Hume City Council.

Nat ABBOUD: Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor of Merri-bek City Council.

The ACTING CHAIR: Great. Thank you all for being here. Just to let you know, all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the 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, these 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. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website

For the Hansard record, we have got your names. I will invite you collectively to make opening statements of about 10 to 15 minutes, depending on who would like to kick things off.

Carly MOORE: I will start. My name is Carly Moore, and I am the very proud Mayor of Hume city. I am joined today by council's Chief Executive Officer Sheena Frost. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on an issue of significant importance to our community. I would like to acknowledge the Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Rachel Payne for bringing forward this motion that has led to this inquiry. It has provided our community with an important and a formal opportunity to be heard. Thank you, Ms Payne. I also extend my thanks to all members of the Legislative Council who supported the motion, and to our local Member for the Western Metropolitan Region David Ettershank for his ongoing support and guidance to our community in navigating this issue.

I want to start by acknowledging that council recognises the important role that the circular economy plays in reducing waste to landfill. We acknowledge the Victorian government's policy direction in this space. Of course one of the key mechanisms being pursued is the development of waste-to-energy facilities. These can be

deeply contested within communities like ours, and we have seen our community come out today to voice their opposition to having these facilities so close to where our families live. While council does not oppose this technology in principle, we have listened closely to our community. The level of concern is significant, particularly given the proposed locations and the lack of clear, consistent and trusted information about the potential impacts. Importantly, this parliamentary inquiry is the first formal opportunity council has had to place our position on the public record, so with the time I have today I will focus on three key areas that we believe are most important to our community. These are the impacts on residential communities and transport infrastructure, the inadequacy of messaging from the Victorian government and the Victorian government approvals and processes.

Firstly, with respect to the impacts on residential communities and transport infrastructure, council is deeply concerned that no other known facility in Victoria is proposed as close to residentially zoned land as the HiQ proposal here in Sunbury. Based on the Sunbury South and Lancefield Road PSPs, this is just 800 metres. We cannot support or expect our families to build their dream homes so close to this proposed facility, and our community are, quite fairly, concerned about the health, wellbeing and long-term livability impacts. As a result, Hume City Council has called on the Victorian government to refuse approval of the waste-to-energy facility proposed for Sunbury, and we have also recommended refusal of the Wollert proposal, given its impacts extend into our municipality here in Hume. Council also urges the Victorian government to reconsider future residential development planned near the proposed HiQ site, particularly given the expected growth in surrounding communities, and recommends that minimum buffer zones for any future waste-to-energy developments be mandated based on independent scientific modelling of emissions and plume impacts to ensure the protection of residential communities. These decisions must be guided by evidence, not assumptions.

Transport is another major concern. Our experience with the West Gate Tunnel spoil transported to HiQ has already demonstrated the strain it placed on our road networks. We expect that additional truck movements going to and from the proposed Sunbury and Wollert sites would lead to significant disruptions to arterial and freeway networks in and around the proposed sites at HiQ and Wollert, specifically increased traffic along Sunbury Road and the Hume Freeway. Sunbury Road is a critical connection between Sunbury and Melbourne, including access to the Tullamarine Freeway, and it is one of only two major routes servicing the area. While part of Sunbury Road has been duplicated, the section between Melbourne Airport and Bulla-Diggers Rest Road remains a single lane, creating bottlenecks, safety risks and limited emergency access. The Hume Freeway is already at capacity. Residents travelling south from Melbourne's north regularly experience commute times exceeding 2 hours each way. We see persistent bottlenecks that create daily gridlock. Our road safety is deteriorating as congestion increases, and industrial, commercial and population growth is rapidly outstripping the corridor's capacity, placing strain on our local communities and the national freight movement. Without significant investment congestion delays and safety risks will intensify. This will leave our new communities underserved and will limit our region's economic potential. If these waste-to-energy facilities proceed despite our strong opposition, the state must commit to urgently duplicating Sunbury Road and accelerating upgrades to the Hume Freeway.

I also want to address the inadequacy of messaging from the Victorian government. It is council's view that community concern has been amplified by the absence of clear, independent and transparent messaging from the Victorian government regarding the safety and impacts of waste-to-energy technology. At present there is no single trusted source of information explaining the safety, impacts and operation of waste-to-energy facilities in a way that communities can understand and rely on. This has created uncertainty. Council is calling for the development of clear, expert-led communication that provides transparent and accessible information to the public. Communities deserve to understand what is being proposed, what it means for them and what risks and safeguards are in place.

And finally, council has serious concerns about the transparency of the approvals process. The issuing of cap licences prior to final planning approvals has created a perception in the community that decisions have already been made. Why else would a cap licence be issued if there was no expectation that a development would take place? This undermines trust. We strongly believe that meaningful government-led community engagement must occur much earlier in the process, not after it appears to have already been determined. Communities should have a genuine opportunity to contribute at the outset, not as an afterthought.

In closing, as I reflected on what I would say to you all today, I recounted the many messages that I have received from members of the Hume community over the years. My community has told me that for too long

our community has been treated like a dumping ground. The announcement of new cap licences for waste-to-energy developments in Hume city and the neighbouring City of Whittlesea was another hit to the great people of Hume city. It came on the back of a decision in 2021 where the Victorian government approved that the contaminated West Gate Tunnel Project spoil would be sent to our community. At the time, in 2021, council issued the following statement:

Hume City Council is dismayed that Bulla has been selected as the location to store contaminated spoil from the West Gate Tunnel project.

...

“We share our community’s uncertainty around personal health and wellbeing and the potential impacts on the local environment.

Let alone the significant increase in safety concerns regarding traffic that will add further pressure to a road network already under strain and in need of urgent upgrades.

We have real safety concerns about allowing hundreds of extra trucks that will be on local roads and potentially crossing the narrow, dangerous and heritage bridge at Bulla.”

Now fast-forward to 2026, to today, and that same statement still stands. The only difference is we would replace the words ‘contaminated spoil’ with ‘waste-to-energy development’. That is why council has taken a strong position in opposing these proposals. We do not do so lightly. My priority as Mayor of this city is to support the best outcomes for my municipal community and to reflect the voices of the community, and we are quite clearly saying no to a waste-to-energy plant here in Hume. I thank the committee for its time and consideration, and I look forward to the outcomes of this inquiry. Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Mayor. Sheena, would you like to add anything?

Sheena FROST: I have nothing to add to the Mayor’s public statement.

The ACTING CHAIR: No worries. Cr Abboud.

Nat ABOUD: Thank you so much. Do not worry about my notes. It is just how I roll.

The ACTING CHAIR: Same here.

Nat ABOUD: My name is Nat Abboud, and I am the Merri-bek city Mayor. It is my privilege for the next 12 months or so, or until November. As I was driving up Bulla Road on the way here, I had the privilege of watching two huge wedge-tailed eagles thermalling about that valley where that old heritage bridge is still, and the speed limit is 40 kph. It occurred to me that that speed limit would have been lowered to 40 kph to protect the people who use that road. That is what governments are for, to create legislation that acts to protect people. So I am quite pleased to be able to join this inquiry, and I am proud on your behalf for being involved in it as well. I think what good governments do is make opportunities to hear from community and also other leaders in the communities that we share.

As the Merri-bek Mayor I am really pleased to be able to make the time to come and make our contribution via talking to the submission that we have made about this incineration project, or waste-to-energy as it has become romantically known. I am representing the council and the community because I think that to not do so could be perceived as acquiescence, which is not the position that I want to take, even though potentially the impacts that this project might have will not be as dire on us as they might be to other submitters. The submission itself, which you would have read, talks about the fact that the Merri-bek City Council has a view that the Victorian government should not support the development and expansion of this industry, because investment in large-scale waste-to-energy incineration infrastructure presents long-term financial, environmental and social risks.

We say that waste-to-energy is inconsistent with the first and third principles of the truly circular economy, which is a goal that we have, which are to eliminate waste pollution and to regenerate natural systems. Our council has resolved to prohibit waste-to-energy thermal technologies in its future waste processing contracts. What I mean by that is that we have resolved at Merri-bek City Council not to include our waste as part of a feeder stream, I guess, to a project like this, and we do this in part with our neighbours up the road in mind. It is not a secret that people who cannot necessarily afford access to housing in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne do end up further up the Hume. I know I have family members up the Hume, and I think that it is important to consider that the people who live further up the road to us have the same right to good-quality infrastructure, including the quality of the air that they are breathing.

Just a little bit of history about Merri-bek in this space: we adopted a position that zero waste should be achieved through a circular economy and not reliance on thermal waste-to-energy quite some time ago. Our focus has been waste avoidance; source separation; organics recovery; reuse, repair, recycling; circular procurement; and stronger product stewardship. We think that any state policy response should support these outcomes and avoid locking communities into ongoing residual waste generation. I guess to paraphrase that, in a lot of cases some of what is proposed to be burnt is still a resource that can be reused as something rather than just set fire to. As recently as October 2025 Merri-bek adopted our newest version of the *Circular Economy Strategy*, which maintains our commitment to strive for zero waste to landfill and includes not relying on thermal waste-to-energy. The strategy makes clear that council's primary goal is to reduce total waste generation to support the municipality's transition to a circular economy. It is not a new position for Merri-bek. The council originally unanimously established a position against the use of thermal waste-to-energy back in its *Waste and Litter Strategy* in 2018. I was on the council back then, but I was not on the council in October 2021 when the council reaffirmed its position. So almost half of us were a different group of councillors at the time. It has been a long position of Merri-bek that we do not support waste-to-energy and we prioritise a circular waste economy. The main reason and the rationale for this is not limited to but includes environmental health, economic costs and the fact that burning rubbish undermines a transition to a circular economy.

Then again in April 2024 council through its 'No waste-to-energy incinerator in the northern suburbs' notice of motion reaffirmed its position on waste-to-energy incineration, resolving again to make a submission opposing the proposed Wollert facility, which actually is proposed for about 400 metres, I am told, from the Merri Creek, which runs through our city and either side of the ward that I live on. There is a concern there, which has been raised to me by community, about potential contamination of the creek, which would be disastrous. It already needs quite a lot of work to get it up to scratch. I think even the Lord Mayor of Melbourne has talked about swimmable rivers. If contamination on the Merri Creek feeds into the Yarra River, I do not know, because I am not a scientist, but I do not imagine that would be a great scenario for the Lord Mayor's goals of a swimmable Yarra, which we support, I might add.

I think it is no secret that I could probably go on and on and on, but I will just finish on this last bit of storytelling. In October last year I attended the waste-to-energy forum that was held in the city at the exhibition centre, and I sat in on the Cleanaway conversation – there were a few different people there, but Cleanaway were in the room as well – about the waste-to-energy facility that is in WA. It concerned me greatly, but I just heard them out and then at the end of the presentation I hung around for a little while so I could just ask a question about the plans that Cleanaway had for processing the bottom ash, which seems to be one of the important parts at the end of this idea that needs to be addressed, as well as what has been raised about burning diesel to keep the fires going and not repurposing waste or transitioning it through a circular economy or whatever. But when I asked those presenters about what the plans were for Cleanaway and the proposals for Sunbury and Wollert with the bottom ash, they did not have an answer, which concerned me greatly because as a city Mayor and a city councillor, people ask us questions directly and it feels kind of irresponsible when you do not have an answer for somebody about something that should have an answer to it. The only thing that I could say to people who were talking to me about it is that Cleanaway had not been asked to tick that part of the application, which to me seems quite significant. So if I can ask a question of the whole process, I am interested to hear more about that as well in the future and will be keeping an eye on it all. But I really appreciate the chance to be able to present. Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Great. Thank you all for presenting today. Ms Broad, would you like to go first?

Gaëlle BROAD: Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much for your input today. It is helpful to have councils' perspective on that, and your submissions as well. We have heard today from residents. They have seen the government override local communities in other locations, even to the point of fining residents if authorised officers are not allowed to go on their properties. Do you think that this is a done deal, or do you think there is any avenue for it not to go ahead?

Carly MOORE: I would hope it is not a done deal. I think the community has come out in strong numbers today to show their opposition to this, and I would certainly hope that it is not a done deal. We have had experience with the West Gate Tunnel spoil, which was back in 2021, and certainly council did do its very best to try and stop that spoil from coming to our city. But unfortunately we were not successful, so I would hope that it is not the same story where there was nothing that we could do to stop this happening here.

Nat ABBOUD: Along the same lines, I also would hope it is not a done deal. But just from the perspective of the fact that I do not think the process has been transparent enough, and I think there are still too many big questions that remain unanswered, I think that to let it through at this stage without some of those things being addressed just erodes trust in government and it just actually diminishes people's safety as well. We know that there are stories and learned scenarios about this kind of stuff in other parts of the world, and I just do not think it has been teased out enough. I think there is a lot more work to do before it could be locked in, so I hope not is the short answer.

Gaelle BROAD: Certainly there is a sense from the community today that there is a lot of mistrust of government authorities as well, such as the EPA. You mentioned clear and independent information that is transparent. How will that happen? Who would you draw on? Have you seen any models elsewhere that you think we could learn from in Victoria?

Nat ABBOUD: That is a really good question. But I do not know that the onus is on community and local councils to come up with that stuff. I think that to some extent we really rely on the process to absolutely delve right into the detail and do the investigating. I know that is why you are having this inquiry, but I think that there are a lot of questions to ask.

Gaelle BROAD: Yes, so –

Carly MOORE: Sorry. Can I also add to that? There are a couple of points I want to make in relation to that. In terms of the Vic government's messaging, I have got an insert in front of me, which is 'Is waste-to-energy safe?', and this is on one of the Vic gov websites. Even reading that, it absolutely does not answer the question.

Gaelle BROAD: It is a couple of paragraphs, I think, isn't it?

Carly MOORE: It is a couple of paragraphs, and it does not answer the question at all. In terms of how council was able to come to its submission, I am an accountant, like Nat. I am also not a scientist. So we did seek some independent advice. We had two experts come to brief the council, and I think all councillors walked away from that saying, 'I couldn't say that it is safe or not.' So I think that it is certainly a very big concern. I have got access to those resources, and I still cannot tell you if it is safe.

The other point I wanted to pick up on is I have sat through a few hours of this this afternoon, so I have heard what some of the other speakers have had to say. I think there are real concerns about social licence. We have absolutely heard that from some of the people in the comments that they have made around the process so far – the lack of communication and the lack of clear messaging. So I think there are a few points to make on that.

Sheena FROST: If I may add, my observation would be it appears to be that the messaging is being proponent-led, which then I think ties in to the impact of the social licence, and that would lead to the mistrust in community. So I think that is the opportunity from a government-led position if it is the policy position to be owning that messaging and have it fairly clear and simple and straightforward, if this is the position to be followed to lead to the circular economy outcomes that are being sought.

Gaelle BROAD: I can see that in the recommendations you are wanting the Victorian government to be leading that conversation.

Nat ABBOUD: Can I just add something to that as well? I think that it is important to consider that when you acknowledge the level of mistrust, it is quite important to also consider that potentially that is borne by the fact that maybe some of these organisations are under-resourced. For whatever reason, it is important to also consider that if that is actually the case, this is not the time to be doing something like this, only because if the organisations that are not being trusted are under-resourced to keep a tab on all of this stuff, the risk matrix is out of whack as well.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Okay. We are going to try to come to Dr Mansfield on the screen. It is intermittently dropping out. Go for it.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. Thank you for appearing today, and apologies – the audio has been sketchy all day. It sort of drops out for 20 seconds or so every couple of minutes, so let us see how we go. This could be a question for all of you. You have all highlighted concerns that your councils have around waste incineration, and we are seeing a number of councils that have said that they will not send their municipal waste to these sorts of facilities. Where is the waste going to come –

The ACTING CHAIR: Just lost you, Sarah.

Nat ABBOUD: I feel like I could finish her question.

The ACTING CHAIR: Okay. Why don't you have a go?

Nat ABBOUD: She will work out that we cannot hear her in a minute, potentially. But that question about where does the waste stream come from, if we are all saying that we are not prepared to give the waste – then also along the same lines, is burning diesel really what this thing is designed to do? That seems quite concerning to me.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have got you back, Sarah, if you want to add anything to the end of your question.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I was just saying how does the business case for these sorts of facilities stack up? There are lots of councils saying, 'We don't want to send our –

The ACTING CHAIR: All right. We will roll from there.

Sheena FROST: Thank you for the question. I think that is a really good question around the business case, because I have attended a couple of sessions probably at the end of last year, just trying to understand the implication. The business model, as I understand it – and I am not the expert, but they take a very long time to establish and they require a lot of financing in advance in order to get the facilities up and running. From a session we went to, they obviously rely on the local councils as the feedstock to be able to make the facilities work. My take as I walked away, and I recall discussing with the Mayor, the requirement would be that we have to be prepared to commit to a 10-year contract for a facility that would not come into existence for many, many years. I think my Mayor will be able to say how hard that would be for officers to convince a local government to take on board what could be a six-figure, multi, multi, multimillion-dollar contract for 10 years – for something that does not exist yet, it is quite a stretch. But my understanding is that is the level of commitment that would be required to underpin the financial viability of the model.

So for me at the moment, that also accounts for why we need stronger communication and understanding and support to understand it. We also still do not have any guarantees around what the levies or gate fees would be. There are references that there may be gate fees, which could be reasonable, could be not, but I am sure every member of the committee is aware of the impact the increasing landfill levies have had on local government, particularly. While that was a deterrent to try and help support the circular economy and reduce waste, certainly in Hume our experience has been it has just led to increasing costs, and we would say also increasing rates of illegal dumping that we therefore pay for also. We spent \$10 million in 2024–25 on EPA landfill levies in our budget.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I suppose further to that, the levy collected is going into the Sustainability Fund. That is meant to be spent on circular economy initiatives. We know that the money is sort of piling up in that fund. Do you think that the government is investing enough in genuinely circular economy supporting initiatives, and if not, what more would you like to see done in that space?

Nat ABBOUD: It is a hard no from me.

Carly MOORE: Yes, my short answer to that question is no. I do not expect they are investing enough – absolutely not.

Nat ABBOUD: To build further on the hard no, probably money could be spent educating people about (a) how to treat rubbish but also educating producers of rubbish – like, I have no problem buying a Mars bar, because it is wrapped in paper again – about how we consume rubbish. You know, the fish rots from the head. We need to go back to all of this procurement stuff and back to the beginning of the way we do packaging so

that we are not creating such an intense amount of rubbish that cannot be processed in a more environmentally sustainable way.

The ACTING CHAIR: Great. Are you happy there, Dr Mansfield?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. I was having a chat during the break about milk coming in glass bottles and chips wrapped in paper and different things. Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Can I firstly thank you for the report that went through Hume council recently. I am sure the residents would be very excited that council has come on so strongly on this issue. A couple of quick ones first if I may: am I correct in my understanding that the current structure plan or the PSP for the boundary with the HiQ site actually has a proposed town centre as well as multiple low-rise residential literally on the boundary with HiQ?

Sheena FROST: I have got the numbers. Did you want to answer this?

Carly MOORE: No.

Sheena FROST: In terms of proximity to HiQ, I might need to take that on notice just to confirm. In the last five years in that area within those two PSPs we have identified, we have had 2700 lots, and there are another 4000 lots expected in the five years following, so it is currently only 12 per cent complete. So that gives you a sense of the size and scale of those PSPs.

Carly MOORE: The closest residential zoned land is only 800 metres away, but I do not have any information in regard to where the town centre is located, so we would have to take that question on notice.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. And perhaps you could also confirm my suspicion that that PSP or that structure plan has actually been approved by a previous planning minister. There is some inconsistency there. Okay, could I just clarify the extent of consultation between Hume council and the state government or the EPA, Recycling Victoria, prior to the awarding of the capped licences: was there any, or what was the extent of it, do you know?

Carly MOORE: There was certainly no consultation with the mayor of the day. I cannot speak to whether officers had received any correspondence or consultation, but I do not have those.

Sheena FROST: Yes, I would have to take on notice if there would be anything. I do not recall anything. But yes, I would have to take it on notice and just double-check the records on that. There was nothing formal that asked for our feedback.

David ETTERS HANK: Well, that is pretty stunning given the sensitivity of the issues. Okay, thank you for that. You have identified in the recommendations from the report adopted by council that there needs to be a duplication of Bulla Road or Sunbury Road. I think a number of the witnesses today have supported that. Has council actually done any traffic modelling with regard to what the likely impact is and how that roadway would deal with that?

Sheena FROST: We have.

David ETTERS HANK: Would you prefer to take that on notice?

Carly MOORE: We do have it here.

Sheena FROST: We do have it here, but we could come back to it, sorry. But on that, because we did do modelling at the time with the West Gate Tunnel spoil and were concerned about the volume of traffic – the truck volume at that time – and the 40-kilometre speed limit actually was initiated at that time in response to some of the concerns we had raised. So from the 2020 knowledge that we had on the West Gate Tunnel, that led to about 130,000 truck movements a year – that is what we would have been modelling it at. So anyone who is, obviously, familiar with that bridge and that area – near misses and the risks around that bridge with that truck volume – we consider it quite risky.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. Thank you. Could I ask: has council been approached by either the government or HiQ to enter into contracts for a waste stream to HiQ?

Sheena FROST: We have not, no.

Carly MOORE: No, I have not either.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. In terms of the capacity of 750,000 tonnes, there has been quite a lot of stuff about, 'We have to be able to service Hume,' and I know there are various ways you can calculate it, but roughly how much red bin waste would you be producing in Hume council catchment per annum?

Carly MOORE: I think we would have to take that on notice. In terms of tonnes, were you asking?

David ETTERS HANK: Yes, tonnes would be great. I guess the question in my mind is I have heard figures from, I think, 14,000 tonnes to 90,000 tonnes.

The ACTING CHAIR: I think someone said 85,000 tonnes earlier, but they were not from the council.

David ETTERS HANK: But then that figure was – 20 per cent of that amount was red bin waste.

The ACTING CHAIR: Sorry, yes.

David ETTERS HANK: I guess the thing I am interested in is it is supposedly servicing the Hume council. There is a yield of 750,000 tonnes, and so I think the question in lots of people's minds is: take out whatever that is – whether it is 20,000 tonnes or 90,000 tonnes a year – does that leave a gap of over 700,000 tonnes, and where is that going to come from? So it would be great if we could get some firm clarity on that. Thank you. How am I going, Chair? Have I got time for one more?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay, great. In your recommendations you talk about the Victorian government mandate that all future waste-to-energy developments be a minimum of 2 kilometres away. Can I ask: I think we have heard people here and we have had experts say 5 kilometres, 10 kilometres or what have you, and they are not comfortable with those sorts of margins. Where did the two clicks come from as a recommendation.

Carly MOORE: So 2 kilometres was what was written in the submission that was prepared by our officers, but certainly in the recommendation that should have been submitted the 2 kilometres reference should have been removed, and our request is that whatever the buffer zone is is based on evidence as opposed to an arbitrary number.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay.

Carly MOORE: The 2 kilometres was based on where we have seen other waste-to-energy facilities and how close they have been to residential homes, but certainly on the night the 2-kilometre reference was removed from the recommendation, but I acknowledge must be still included in the text.

David ETTERS HANK: I will be guided by the Chair or the secretariat as to how we deal with that, because obviously it is in the submission that has been put before council. So you are basically saying recommendation 3, minimum of 2 kilometres, should not be actually included?

Carly MOORE: Yes. So that was adjusted on the night of the meeting.

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

The ACTING CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Ettershank. I want to start off just following on from a question from Mrs Broad around whether there is a chance this will not proceed. Are you aware that Lara had a waste-to-energy facility that upon an application was not granted?

David ETTERS HANK: For a capped licence?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes, for a cap. Okay, yes. So I suppose that is just to be aware that when the application process opened there, it was not. One of the things I have been trying to dig into today is I think all the witnesses have come with a starting point of no to a waste-to-energy facility, so as we table a report, what recommendations can we make to government to deal with waste? What alternatives are there? I think you are very perfectly placed as councils collecting waste. What recommendations would you have around the alternatives that we look at?

Nat ABBOD: I think that what is prudent is to take a deeper focus on the idea of a circular economy, and also the piece of work that helps to create less waste in the first place, so the investment – and none of these projects are cheap – could actually go back to the top of the equation: where the waste is created in the first place. And at a micro level on our council, we do stuff like our plastic wise policy, where we do not give ground allocation to sporting clubs who use plastic, or we do not have festivals where you get your stuff from a food van in plastic. All of this stuff is actually achievable; it is just going back to the very beginning of where the waste is created. I think that with a deeper focus on that part of the package – and I am hopeful that we will get there – we can start to create less waste so that it can be better managed.

The ACTING CHAIR: And Hume?

Carly MOORE: A couple of points to note. We are supportive of circular economy principles. Council is absolutely supportive of that. We do not have an endorsed position in terms of other options for disposing of our red bin waste. I think we certainly do acknowledge, though, that the diversion rates in Hume are not good relative to some other councils, but we have seen improvement, and our focus is absolutely on those circular economy principles and trying to make sure that we are educating our community to make sure that they are only putting things in the red bin that belong in the red bin.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have heard from witnesses today from the community who have come, and it only just came up about having three bins in Hume. So that is something that is rolling out across the state, and my understanding is Hume is actively spearheading against a fourth bin. We have heard how for materials to be used to their highest value and to get the circular economy going by separating waste at the source, at people's homes, the whole thing can happen. So how do we deal with that contradiction where you are saying, granted, you do not want waste-to-energy, but at the same time you are saying you do not want to invest in getting that separation occurring.

Carly MOORE: I was here for some of those discussions, so I did hear the conversations around the purple bin. And that is right – in May last year council resolved not to introduce a purple bin. There are a couple of reasons for that. I know that the conversation talked about the financial burden on ratepayers, but that was not really the key driver, although we think the introduction would cost our ratepayers around \$10 million in the first year. But we think that that is very much a duplication of the container deposit scheme. We have seen great take-up of that scheme in our city. And if I speak from my personal experience, I do not think a purple bin is warranted, because I would be able to put that out once every six months – for example, the occasional bottle of wine, maybe a spaghetti sauce container, but the rest of my glass is able to go in the container deposit scheme. So I would be supportive personally, although not a council-endorsed position, of expanding that scheme to be able to take more glass. We are a city that has lots of people living in very close proximity, and we do not have room for every person to have four bins. So we think that it is not the time for us to be introducing that. Given we already have very low diversion rates, I do not expect it would have a significant impact on improving those diversion rates.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. Is there anything else that council is mindful of – whether that is state government or federal government or council – a very practical, tangible thing that could be implemented at council working on policies to reduce that waste coming in from your residents and businesses?

Sheena FROST: Our experience, particularly in Hume, given the diversity of our community, has been the value of education and spending on education. We have invested probably millions in the last couple of years on programs to educate our community around appropriate waste disposal and trying to reduce our illegal dumping rates too. It is complicated, and I think as much as possible if systems are simplified across the state so it is not each council – and the container deposit scheme is a great example of that. There has been great take-up, and if you suddenly introduce something new saying, 'Some of the glass goes here and some of the glass can go in two different locations' it becomes confusing. In our community we have realised how important it is

to just roll your sleeves up, make it simple and talk to your community as simply as possible to get behaviour change in place. You can have a real impact through those, and I think it is all about trying to reduce the waste coming into the stream in the first place. And if you can make that message as simple as possible, you could increase your diversion rates, which is what we have been working to do because we have such –

The ACTING CHAIR: The only question I put back to you on that is by Hume not taking on a glass bin, and this has been a proposed programme of work that councils have adopted. All of a sudden, if people move into this council, it does not have a green waste bin. But I might leave that as a comment because you have already made your position clear, thank you. Maybe I will just hit on the word you said, which is ‘complicated’. We have all been here today, I think – oh, sorry. I will come back to Mr Ettershank.

David ETTERS HANK: All good, thanks. Right now?

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes, I am done. You go.

David ETTERS HANK: Thanks. Dr Mansfield before raised the question of the landfill levy, which I think has grown from almost nothing to close to half a billion dollars. I have not been able to find anything in the current budget to say that it is being spent on anything. But what I am particularly interested in is with the pressures that have been put on councils to effectively collect those landfill levies – and they have been increasing, obviously, very, very rapidly – do you see that as influencing the decisions of your councils to support waste-to-energy as a way of trying to, to some degree, extract yourself from the unpopular policies around the landfill levy?

Nat ABBOD: Well, Merri-bek does not support it. So no, I do not.

Carly MOORE: I think the only point I would make about the landfill levy is – and it is a cheeky point, perhaps – I suspect it is part of the driver for the significant issue we have here in the City of Hume in relation to illegal dumping of rubbish.

David ETTERS HANK: Sure. Okay. Thank you.

Sheena FROST: From the administration point of view, I would say it is not possible to provide advice to the council at the moment, because we do not know what the other fees would be to participate in waste-to-energy. There is no knowledge around what they are. The intention would be that there are gate fees or some sort of subsidy required to support the scheme, and so it is not even possible to suggest that might be the case because we do not know what the fees will be yet.

David ETTERS HANK: I think I will classify my question as a swing and a miss, Chair. Thank you very much.

Nat ABBOD: Do you mind if I make a quick comment about the purple bins? Merri-bek was one of the first councils to adopt the purple bin, because at the time I think we had given up on the container deposit scheme. We wanted to sort that out quickly, and we have a community that has been, I guess, educated – maybe some other word would be used – to address its waste for quite some time, with the food and green organics and every other thing. But we absolutely support the idea of expanding the CDS to include wine bottles and that sort of thing. I do not drink, and all my jars end up with jam in them, so our bin rarely goes out. I just want to stress that we do understand the perspective of the councils that have held out for a while on the purple bin scenario, but just that getting it in early – maybe that was part of the reason that the CDS. Yes, we have a very different position, but we still completely understand the perspective of the councils that are holding firm to not adopting the purple bins.

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes. Thank you. Mrs Broad has one more question.

Gaëlle BROAD: Yes, I was just wondering – earlier you mentioned there were a number of questions that remain unanswered for the community. Are there any particular questions that you would like us to perhaps put forward to the government? I think you mentioned what the fees would be or things like that. Have you put forward questions and not had answers? Is there any way we can assist?

Carly MOORE: I guess the greatest question for me and for the community is: is this safe? That is the question that I would like to have answered the most.

Nat ABBOUD: Just onto that also – the parts of it that are not safe, will they be dealt with appropriately? And with that, I have the bottom ash in mind.

Sheena FROST: Again, from the purely administration and numbers point of view, we had a Q&A back from RV, probably September 2025. It was unclear whether our position on the purple bins meant we could not participate in waste-to-energy. It could be inferred. But there has been nothing further apart from a Q&A which went to a number of councils who were participating in forums. I think clarity on if we are not having a purple bin, does that mean we cannot send our waste to such a facility in the first place? I think it is open to interpretation as to how we were meant to view some of the advice we received.

Nat ABBOUD: I think also – because I have, like, subliminal Merri-bekian voices yelling at the back of my head, in my mind – testing. Do you feel confident that the organisations that support this stuff will have appropriate levels of testing if things do go wrong? What are the emergency responses going to look like if something goes wrong? I think that just all of those pieces about – if this fails, is it really, as I heard on my computer this afternoon, 12 hours a year of testing? It just does not seem like it is enough. I think that for governments to get out of this phase of incivility and a lack of trust and all that stuff, we have a responsibility to make sure that all the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you.

The ACTING CHAIR: All right. That is all the questions. On behalf of everyone on the committee, I want to say a big thank you to the witnesses, particularly the witnesses that have come in on their own time – those with kids, families, busy lives – and to all the research that has been done by our witnesses, again from the community, and those that have made the time. I do not think it can be understated – this is, in my four years, the biggest hearing I have attended and seen from the community. It is obvious how much passion and interest there is. I am a sparky by trade and I am really passionate about climate and renewables and energy, and these poor colleagues might have to suffer me in Parliament talking about it, but waste-to-energy to me was a real spot I was not familiar with. For us to hold these inquiries and come along and hear and learn, and then to be able to, with the support of those working in the department, compile it and put it to government is really, really important. I think as we see challenges in democracy around the world, the fact that everyone can come into a room and provide witness, and for the audience to act the way you have today, is a real sign to us and to Parliament that we can go out into community and continue to have these sorts of engagements.

If no-one has anything further to say, I am going to leave it there. Thank you all. I ask that broadcast and Hansard equipment now be turned off.

Committee adjourned.