

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne – Friday 8 May 2026

#### MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

Richard Welch – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Gaelle Broad

Katherine Copsey

Moira Deeming

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Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

**WITNESSES**

Cath Rouse, No Northern Incinerator Wollert Inc;

Les Dew, President, and

Chaz Street, Secretary, No Waste Incinerators in Lara and Greater Geelong Incorporated; and

Dr Marion Cincotta, and

Max Sargent, Victorian Anti-Incinerator Alliance.

**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 respect 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 live broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast and in the public gallery with us today.

To kick off, we will just have committee members introduce themselves, starting with Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thank you, Chair. John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

**David ETTERSANK:** Hi. David Ettershank, Western Metropolitan Region.

**The CHAIR:** Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

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

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you so much for coming along and 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 names and the organisations you are appearing on behalf of. We will start down here.

**Chaz STREET:** My name is Chaz Street. I am the Secretary of No Waste Incinerators in Lara and Greater Geelong Incorporated.

**Les DEW:** My name is Les Dew. I am the President of No Waste Incinerators in Lara and Greater Geelong Incorporated.

**Marion CINCOTTA:** Hello. I am Marion Cincotta and I am with the Anti-Incinerator Alliance.

**Max SARGENT:** Max Sargent from the Victorian Anti-Incinerator Alliance.

**Cath ROUSE:** And I am Catherine Rouse, Vice President of No Northern Incinerator Wollert Incorporated.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, everyone. We will now move to opening comments, and whoever would like to go first can start. Great.

**Cath ROUSE:** Chair and committee, thanks for holding this inquiry, participating in it and giving us this opportunity to speak. I also acknowledge the Wurundjeri, the traditional owners of this land and Wollert, just 26 kilometres to our north. Wollert is the special name given to the area, derived from the Woi-wurrung word for 'place of many possums'. It would be a travesty if it became known for a huge toxic incinerator. You heard from Julie this morning and the fabulous Al Siraat students. Julie is the president of No Northern Incinerator Wollert. They shared so many of the reasons why we are also categorically opposed to waste incinerators in Victoria. First, I will keep setting the scene of why we are opposing this Wollert waste incinerator and why it is so important to us, and then I will share some of what we have confronted when working with the regulatory framework.

The proposed site for the Wollert waste incinerator is a farm at 510 Summerhill Road, and you heard from Rod yesterday, who also lives on that road. I am a bit of a walker. Google says that it is just a 7.5-hour walk from there to here, so if you left there now you could get here by dinnertime. You can imagine, though, what would happen if it was operating, with the toxins in the air, and a 30-kilometre-an-hour northerly came through, and then think of the cumulative effects with the wind in all directions 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for 30 years. The potential effects are enormous. From this farm in Melbourne's northern growth corridor Donnybrook is 2 kilometres to the north; Wollert, where the Al Siraat students come from, is 2 kilometres to the south and east; and much of Craigieburn is within 5 kilometres to the west. Just 1.3 kilometres north-west is the proposed Shenstone PSP. The farm borders the Curly Sedge Creek and is only 750 metres from the Merri Creek.

The population of this area is going up like a rocket. Here are some of the current brochures. There are people buying properties there – families. They just want to have fresh air and family living. We have visited all of the sales areas, and none of the developers are helping let people know what is really happening there. People are getting mortgages every day for properties to live within the close area of this farmland. They are moving there for fresh air and kangaroos nearby. It is marketed as ideal for children. Eleven new schools have opened up within 7 kilometres of this farm in the last 10 years since 2018, with five existing schools in Craigieburn, so there are 16 schools within 7 kilometres of the site. What is the government responsibility to these families and children?

I will just go through the four processes we have undertaken so far as part of that regulatory framework. The original proposal was for 380,000 tonnes per year or 10 million tonnes over the life of the project, and Cleanaway have indicated but not formally applied to increase this waste incinerator to double that: 760,000 tonnes per annum or 20 million tonnes over its life. First, there is an environment effects statement. The planning minister stated an environment effects statement was not required for the original plan. This set up distrust in all of the processes. We do not know anything about the environment effects statement for the double-size project, adding to the distrust. The EPA development licence was announced for consultation in February 2024, which is where we met as a group. The EPA explained to us on multiple occasions that they had four months to either accept or decline the licence. We got together, despite it being Ramadan, and started the work spreading the word – resulting, with the diverse community, in 764 submissions being made, virtually all opposing the waste incinerator – double the number of submissions that had ever been received before.

This triggered a conference of interested persons where we were accepted to participate as individuals but not permitted to give a presentation or have a table in the building, while Cleanaway, the proponent, was given much room for tables inside and was given a big timeframe to present to the participants. Despite this imbalance, we had done our research and expressed our concerns, and that resulted in this independent MosaicLab report produced for the EPA, which is part of our submission. It stands as stating many of the community concerns and the absolute lack of social licence in this waste incinerator. We never did receive answers to the concerns or questions. We also did not hear, after four months, what was happening. But after 13 months Cleanaway withdrew their application with the stated intention of doubling the size of the proposed waste incinerator, so the EPA timeframe, which we had encouraged the community to participate in, blew out threefold without explanation or communication. As part of this development licence, we researched Cleanaway's current status and history. We were appalled to read of the many convictions and atrocious work safety record and also the *Australian Financial Review* reporting them as being the most susceptible large company for takeover from private equity. But we are most horrified to say that since mid 2022 Cleanaway have had nine workplace deaths. We are not talking risk analysis; we are talking deaths of workers. The last two were here in the north of Melbourne.

Then we come to Recycle Victoria and the cap. Given Cleanaway's atrocious record, we were shocked to hear that they were given a cap that was double the tonnage of the original plan for the Wollert incinerator, not to mention that the statewide cap to us in the initial consultations was triple, adding to our feelings of having been misled. We went to the national waste expo to hear the rationale of both the quantity and allocation of the cap. Still we were not given any answers. How can a company, Cleanaway, who has had so many deaths – nine – on sites here in Australia, whose own shareholders had a strike at their 2025 AGM, at the very same time be awarded the trust of the top spot in the cap allocation process without any transparency and the process has been hidden from us? We ask: how many deaths does it take not to be fit and proper? Does it take a dozen? We learned at the conference about the role of Recycling Victoria, which sees itself as overseeing the establishment of waste-to-energy and providing guidance and advice as well as being the regulator. As Dan said yesterday in the very first presentation, this appears to be a direct conflict. As one example, we have seen firsthand council officers and councillors acting in accordance with Recycling Victoria advice to encourage community members to just talk directly to the Cleanaway's PR company, repeatedly suggesting to us we should invite Cleanaway to our meetings, and when we were trying to encourage community members to participate in this very inquiry a council officer was writing emails to community groups asking them to contact Cleanaway's PR company directly as the main means of objecting to the incinerator. This undermined our advice for community to make contact and submit to this inquiry.

In the planning permit, the information is effectively hidden. The planning permit is still not open, to all of the knowledge I have got, but on the front page of the Engage Victoria site, it states it has been closed since November 2024. There were a whole other variety of things. This is despite it not having a current licence application. The supporting documents that Cleanaway have provided are wildly out of date. One example is that in this rapidly increasing population, Cleanaway have used the 2016 census – before any of those girls were around, mostly, or they were very young – as a basis for their socio-economic report. Remember, since that date, there are 11 new schools within 7 kilometres of the site. Another is the growling grass frog report. It was prepared before the 2023 discoveries in the Curly Sedge Creek of that vulnerable species, which I have got a photo of in my bag.

In sum, we love Wollert and Melbourne's north. The process of real decision-making has been hidden from us. Not in our backyard, not in anyone else's – we oppose waste incineration in Victoria. They are banned in metro New South Wales and ACT. What will you do as a government with the trust that you have been given?

**Max SARGENT:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am here on behalf of the Victorian Anti-Incinerator Alliance. Health researcher Dr Marion Cincotta will also speak for us. We have made a strong alliance as we can all see the incineration issue in our state is so much bigger than any single project. We are bigger than our individual groups, with the support of Friends of the Earth, and our members being advised by Environment Victoria and Environmental Justice Australia.

When the community has a say, it says no to waste incineration. Submissions to the EPA and to this inquiry overwhelmingly oppose waste incineration. The community is pushing back against incinerators. Many protests; public meetings with MPs, councillors and officials; petitions; submission writing; and awareness-raising campaigns have been and will continue to be organised. The momentum of this issue is building rapidly, with the harms of incineration being broadcast on prime-time commercial and ABC television and radio, as well as online. As one example, our member organisations have had over half a million views on Facebook in the last 90 days.

We can see that Recycling Victoria has acted as an advocate rather than a regulator, and that there is no process for looking at the cumulative harms. Incinerators do not end the need for landfill; they turn low-level, easy-to-manage waste into poisonous material that requires very rare, high-level toxic landfill. Waste incinerators are part of a one-way business model that is dependent on ensuring an endless supply of large volumes of waste. It is unsustainable and is in no way part of an economy that is truly circular.

I would just like to say one other thing from my involvement in the Wollert incinerator issue. At one of the earlier consultations that the EPA held in Wollert – one of the few – in a discussion with the EPA staff member there, I asked what would happen if Cleanaway found that they had overshot their licence pollution limits, if they were to operate the incinerator. He responded that Cleanaway, as the operator, would shut their operation down. So the monitoring would be by Cleanaway, the operator. They would then notice whether they had polluted too much and, being a good corporate citizen, they would close down their operation. This is all while

another rubbish truck would be arriving every few minutes. I mean, it seems that there is a serious problem with the mindset of the EPA, that it is far too much a laissez-faire sort of self-regulation approach and quite naive given the economic imperatives involved. So it was really quite an astounding thing. That said, the EPA should be properly funded, its regulations should be toughened up and it should be given the teeth it needs to act. I will pass over to Marion now.

**Marion CINCOTTA:** Thanks, Max. And thanks to all for hearing my evidence today. I am a gigging scientist. The first part of the evidence I worked up with Professor David O'Neal, who is a brilliant doctor researcher, and he runs a hospital, Werribee Mercy. So we worked this up together, this first part, and we have called it 'Waste to Eternity'.

Air pollution diseases do not go away. Type 2 diabetes is very rarely cured. It must be managed well to prevent serious illness. Asthma is not curable. It must also be managed, and people who have the condition of asthma have to avoid the triggers for that. Front-page news yesterday: there is an asthma cluster in the western suburbs due to the heavy traffic, and hopefully that will be alleviated when vehicles become electrified. Okay, we have type 2 diabetes and asthma. Apologies ahead if this is terrible to hear, but pregnancy loss by miscarriage can be terrible for parents. Research shows us that type 2 diabetes, gestational diabetes, asthma and miscarriage are linked to inhaling fine carbon particles referred to as PM2.5. They are so small that they can enter our cells and they interfere with the mitochondria, and they are involved in the production of these long-term incurable conditions. David made the point that preventing PM2.5 air pollution prevents these conditions.

Dioxin is a forever chemical known to cause cancer. Future cancers can be prevented by not releasing dioxin into the air. In the modern incinerators, which we do not have in this country, but we know from international evidence in China and the other countries where they are, that PM2.5 and dioxin leave. They enter the atmosphere. They are just produced by the simple burning, right? So to prevent the pain, expense and loss of life from these conditions I urge state government to deal with waste without incineration so the community is not exposed to PM2.5 and dioxins. That is the heavy health one.

Now, for the second part of 'Waste to Eternity' I am just going to speak quickly about the physical process. Waste to eternity: damp rubbish is dried using diesel, gas or electricity to genuinely reduce its weight. So waste that was 20 per cent water gets reduced by 20 per cent – water vapour and dry rubbish. So far so good. Plastics are made of oil, so every tonne of dry plastic burnt makes three tonnes of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas which spreads everywhere. Again, carbon dioxide cannot be scrubbed out. It just goes up. It is invisible, but believe me, one tonne turns to three. That is the physical chemistry of it. The burning releases heat, and with some of that heat the plan is to turn it into electricity that we do not need or use, because 35 to 65 per cent of solar power in Victoria is said by the Australian Energy Market Operator, the regulator, to be curtailed or unused. So that is about the distribution system. So to say that waste-to-energy is going to power so many thousand homes – that is not going to happen.

Burning municipal waste in modern incinerators always creates PM2.5, which spreads widely, lasts for decades and has no known safe level. Dioxins are produced in tiny amounts – tiny amounts – and emitted by incinerators, but they have no safe level. They accumulate in our bodies, plant bodies and animal bodies. As referred to earlier, integrated waste management by prevention, recycling, maybe gasification, digestion plants and so on dramatically reduces the environmental and health impacts of municipal solid waste, including PM2.5. That is enough for me, and over to Les.

**Les DEW:** Thank you very much. First of all, I would like to thank each and every one of you and the government for actually doing what you have done over the last two days. It is a great recommendation, and it is very comforting. We know we have got a massive problem with the number of people we have got in the country, and the amount of waste that we have got. We do have to do something, but there is not much point in offering EfW plants, which are only band-aids, and very dangerous band-aids at that.

We have heard from a lot of people. We have got to start to work out how to overcome the problem, besides burning rubbish. Nobody has taken into consideration – not a lot anyway at the moment – that with the amount you burn, you do end up with very toxic bottom ash and fly ash. We also have what is known as air cleaners, like what you have got in a motor car if it is not electric. It has got to go somewhere. Victoria has one place, I understand, where it can go and that is Dandenong South, so it has all got to go there. We are not taking into consideration the mechanics of it all.

What I would like to start off with is that Charles and I have been at this for over five years. I was one of the original people at the first meeting to go in response to Prospect Hill International's mail-out or handout to about 60 people in an area very close to my son's property. My son's property has ended up being 350 metres away from this proposed EfW plant. There is rezoning of the land and a total removal of the buffer zone to the house. Over the road from that house are market gardeners that actually sell to Coles and Woolworths. This is a very, very big problem. We now have an even bigger problem in that Prospect Hill International's neighbour Viterra has built an enormous factory – open doors – for delivery of soy for agricultural use. What comes out of the chimney is actually going to go straight into that agricultural use – that is what we end up using.

I will go back to our original plan. After five years the Lara big incinerator proposal still has an EPA development licence. It is still there; it is current. We went to VCAT, we lost – fair enough. You could question, in Victoria, how you can have an EPA in a state government. One in New South Wales knocks back an EfW plant for exactly the right reasons, yet the one in Victoria, after more than 2½ years of consideration all of a sudden comes up with, 'You've got it,' in an area which is growing a lot faster than what the one was in New South Wales. You have got to question the ability of supposedly the same people: EPA – two different states. I do not know what you people think, but I am under the impression they breathe the same air.

I am going to go into the air, which the EPA has put forward, and Prospect Hill International, back in 2020. But in between times it has still got a proposal for a planning permit sitting on Sonya Kilkenny's desk, which has been there for five years. It could get a planning permit at any time. It did not get a cap licence. In 2020 Lara's selected residents were informed of this EfW plant from a company – not Cleanaway, not Veolia, but Prospect Hill International – which we now know has a direct link to the Chinese government. That may sound surprising, and not a lot of people know this. It has been aired. The directors at the time went direct to the Chinese government. Basically, you could say it is a \$2 company. I probably should not say that, but that is what it is. Prospect Hill International's address is 107 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell. If you go to 107 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell, it is a private house. It did not get a cap licence. Back in 2020 we were informed of Prospect Hill International, which we knew nothing about. We could not find anything out about them. They seemed to have no experience in burning rubbish or collecting rubbish or anything else. So we went off in the middle of COVID and listened to what they had to say.

It is still alive. It has got a development licence. Initially it was a 40,000 arrangement for residential waste. It then went to 400,000 tonnes per annum and went from not just residential but to industrial and commercial waste. If you look at 400,000 tonnes per annum for our little EfW plant, that represents 125 B-double trucks coming into the facility per 24 hours. That is 5.3 trucks per hour, and 125 trucks have got to go out. Nobody is looking into the mechanics of actually getting this rubbish into these incinerators.

The next little problem that we have with our one in Lara is that it has a 10-tonne sorting area. I will let you guys do the calculation for 125 B-double trucks of rubbish. They have nowhere to sort the rubbish. It is all going to go straight into the hopper. It is going to be burnt.

The next problem we have got is that they only want to burn at 850 to 900 degrees. That does not get rid of PFAS. You must burn over 1150 to 1200 degrees.

Next problem: we have an 80-metre-high chimney. What comes out of that chimney when it hits the cool air and prevailing winds is totally different to what the little machine that the EPA is looking at is telling them is coming out of it. I would like to actually just tell you what Prospect Hill International and the EPA are going to monitor. They are going to monitor carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxides, particles PM10 and PM2.5, hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride and volatile organic compounds. That is a lot of stuff that supposedly is safe for the community, people, agriculture and animals. We got hit with all of this. They turned around and said that it is safe. It took over 2½ years for the EPA to actually deliver the development licence. I would like Charles to continue from there, and I will come in with a little bit more later on.

**Chaz STREET:** Sure. And the panel needs to ask questions. Okay, so Les mentioned about his son's house being only 350 metres from –

**Les DEW:** Very quickly I will show you my son's house. There it is there. That is done by Jacobs. There it is with an EFW plant 300 metres away from a bedroom window and three grandchildren, and 125 trucks going in per day. It does not look quite right.

**Chaz STREET:** Okay. Now I just want to mention my daughter's situation. My house is less than 2000 metres from the design position of the stack – or the chimney – for the Lara big incinerator, and my daughter's house with her two little children is only 100 metres further away than that. What are we worried about? The independent ToxicoWatch foundation, based in the Netherlands, has been to the landscapes around many incinerators in Europe in particular, and they found in every case that those landscapes are comprehensively contaminated. We are talking about Beringen in Belgium – that is a fairly recent machine; Harlingen in the Netherlands, which is relatively new; Kaunas in Lithuania; Madrid in Spain; Paris, France – a celebrated case; Plzeň in the Czech Republic; Turňa nad Bodvou in Slovakia – I am not pronouncing that correctly; and Zubieta, which is probably the most recent one, in the Basque country of Spain. The landscapes around these incinerators have been well studied, and they found them comprehensively contaminated. This is very serious, because not only are we talking about people's homes and schools and so forth, but farmland – farmland is really important, because people like Dr Peter Tait and his colleagues have found that the main route by which people are contaminated with the materials that come out of the waste incinerators is through food. So farmland is very important in all this.

Now, 'contaminated' – what are we talking about? We are talking about dioxins and PFAS and heavy metals and so forth. We are talking about carcinogens – cancer-causing agents – mutagens and teratogens. Teratogens cause birth defects – for example, TCDD, the famous dioxin that was the culprit with Agent Orange. So that is what we are really concerned about. Heavy metals have been found – mercury, lead, arsenic, cadmium. We believe that having these materials, especially the carcinogens, spread all over the landscape is just completely contrary to objective 1 in the *Australian Cancer Plan*. Objective 1 is all about maximising cancer prevention and early detection. That is objective 1. So we find this is just completely contrary to that.

In conclusion, quoting Dr Tait again, 'No waste incinerator can be considered safe.' Invoking the precautionary principle, waste incineration in all its forms – and here we include waste gasification, waste pyrolysis and various other species – should be stopped. Essentially that is my point. Thank you.

**Les DEW:** I know it is a little bit unusual, both of us talking at once. But another thing that I would really like to bring up, which has been in the limelight in the last month or so and which has affected us all, is Viva Energy and the very old plant that caught on fire, which I am quite sure we all know all about. The land was obtained from the Geelong council back in 2017. The population growth since then has gone ahead enormously with developers Villawood and Austin. We have Rob Costa that wants to develop in there and we have had Bisinella developing. It is going ahead. I believe it is the second-fastest growth rate place in Victoria.

Prospect Hill International put this application in through Jacobs. Their disclaimer is unbelievable – 2000 pages. They have made a statement; they have not made any attempt whatsoever to make sure any of this information is true or false from PHI. So this started, as you could imagine, a community in uproar over, 'Hey, we can't have these in the Australian Capital Territory. They are reasonably new. Nobody knows anything about them. What comes out of them? What's going on?' So we went to Viva Energy, which owns the LPG site, which was Shell, over the road, 450 metres away from a proposed EFW plant where they are going to burn rubbish at 850 degrees. We have seen industrial sites – it is an old site. We watched the refinery go up five weeks ago. It is possible. So we went to Viva Energy, and they released an email to the EPA before the licence was actually issued. It says:

The proximity of the EFW plant posed an unacceptable risk of the future encroachment from the inappropriate land use and had the potential to adversely affect our ability to operate the site safely.

That is in building and operations. They cannot even have a mobile phone on the site. They cannot have static electricity. It is a pressurised old LPG facility with above-ground and below-ground LPG holding tanks. If it was to have an accident, it would not be a fire. It will be a small fire and it will be what you are looking at on TV on the news. It will be the biggest explosion that Australia has ever seen. And we are considering EFW plants at this location.

**The CHAIR:** I might jump in there. Thank you so much for your opening remarks. We have obviously allowed more time, because I think it sometimes gets more information through to us, so we will have limited

time for questions. I will give members a few minutes each, and just for people on the panel, if we try to keep answers brief just to ensure everyone gets in. If there are further questions from the committee, we can get them submitted on notice. I might kick off with Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for your submissions this morning. You heard this morning from a number of witnesses; I assume that most of you were in the gallery this morning. I asked a number of questions about prevention. Have you got any ideas that you might want to put for the committee for its deliberations about what prevention might look like?

**Chaz STREET:** Prevention?

**John BERGER:** Yes.

**Chaz STREET:** We have three bywords that we go by: reducing consumption, reusing materials and energy and recycling. So we think the focus should be on those three things. If the techniques do not currently exist, we need to invent them. We have got CSIRO; we have got many university departments of engineering and so forth. Get in and invent them.

**John BERGER:** That moves into my next question. Do you have any recommendations of what alternatives might look like?

**Les DEW:** Well, I think one of the things that we have all heard over the last two days and what has been discussed here this morning early on with our first speakers – which was absolutely unbelievable; they nailed it. This is the younger generation showing us the way. We have got to stop. Jacinta Allan, the government, Sonya Kilkenny, you must stop and listen. We have got to come up with a different solution. We all thought asbestos was great to build houses with, great to put into brake shoes, great to put everywhere – buses, cars. We now know that is not right. We are heading down the wrong way with incineration. They themselves even admit it is 20, no more than 30 years. And they are all saying, ‘Yes, but the older ones.’ If you look up what happens globally, it is going down. We have got to come up with a solution, and there is a way around it. We listened to people growing grapevines yesterday – wine. It is a product of Australia, which we do not actually have a lot of anymore. We have got to look at getting rid of the problem, not creating another one.

**John BERGER:** Any other views?

**Max SARGENT:** Yes, I would just like to say I think a lot of this is a bit of a pattern of the expectations being put on the end users – community members – for being responsible for creating waste, but we are all part of this society and this economy, and the community does not get a lot of choice about how manufacturers package their products and the types of materials they use. So my view would be that there needs to be a lot more responsibility put on the manufacturers and the producers of commodities and materials to, first of all, redesign what they are doing so they are designing out waste in the first place, and that includes designing for minimum materials being used in the first place, that those materials are reusable and if they are not reusable, then they are certainly repairable or compostable – that sort of thing. So it is extended producer responsibility, it is redesign and it is providing the systems that people can use that are effective, that are economic and available, so that the waste materials are not an end product of whatever gets sold within the economy. The expectation is that the waste is a cost that is transferred onto the community and not the responsibility of the companies that made it in the first place.

**Cath ROUSE:** Can I just say very briefly: this is a problem that we have created in the last two generations. In my grandparents’ time they actually did not have it. They lived on a farm, and we used things. I have, sadly, gone through the process of going through the things my dad accumulated. He was a carpenter, and everything was wood and reusable. There were not the plastics and stuff. We have in this time transformed society to have all of these disposable things. Now we can transform it into a new way.

**John BERGER:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Berger. We will go to Dr Mansfield.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you. Thank you so much for your submissions and your contributions. We heard in the last session from councils, particularly the ones that have decided to sign contracts to send their

waste to incinerators, that they have considered it the best-case scenario given the existing technologies and processes we have, and that is why even with our best efforts we are going to have a bunch of residual waste and we should send it there. They have said that basically there is not a commercially viable alternative. So it sounds like unless the market delivers some other alternative for waste management, at least some of these councils have decided that incineration is the best option. What is your take on that, if we are just relying on the market to deliver waste management options?

**Cath ROUSE:** Maryvale was approved in 2017. That is going to be 10 years, and they have not begun to build yet. That is not sounding like a sudden financial imperative to me. I have not heard of them getting any finance to go forward with that project.

**Marion CINCOTTA:** Just quickly, my take on it is, given the battery fires and the lack of capacity there is going to be to do the sorting at the site, these are going to be uninsurable.

**Chaz STREET:** Yes. My thought is that denying the public access to the contract is completely unconscionable, completely unacceptable. For one thing, the ratepayers need to know what they are up for. They need to know what the councils – what the SEMAWP – have committed them to and what it is going to cost them. Also, the flavour I get from it too is that they have just gone for whatever is the cheapest option. Maybe if we pay a little more, we can get something better. It should not just be a case of value for money, but also maybe if we pay a little more, we can get better protection of the environment and the community by using better methods and technology.

**Max SARGENT:** I would just like to add that expecting the market to come up with a solution for us is a bit unrealistic. We also have a very large pile of landfill levy growing as we speak that is not being drawn upon in a particularly useful way. That is money that could be spent to provide the systems that we need to reduce waste in the first place. It seems like it is just about exponentially growing, that landfill levy, from the report I have seen.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** So you would say that there is a role for government in supporting alternative waste management options that are maybe better than incineration?

**Max SARGENT:** Yes.

**Chaz STREET:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Just one more, Dr Mansfield, then we will go to Mr Ettershank, thank you.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Okay. We heard from the City of Greater Geelong this morning that, while the city has a policy position that they do not want an incinerator in Geelong, they may consider other combustion technologies. So they have not ruled out things like pyrolysis or gasification, and they also have not ruled out sending their waste to another municipality where it would be incinerated. I would just be interested in your views on that.

**Chaz STREET:** Completely unacceptable. Things like waste pyrolysis and waste gasification – I mean, these are just other forms of combustion. The United States have got 120 years of history of burning garbage, and they are awake to all these ruses. When you look at their definition of what a waste incinerator is, they use the term ‘municipal waste combustor’, and that includes all forms of incinerators, all forms of waste pyrolysis and gasification and so forth. That is the definition that we use. We use that American definition, and we believe that Geelong city council, in fact all the councils and the government, should all be using the same definition, and they should be ruling out all of these different forms of municipal waste combustion. We believe they are all inappropriate.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Dr Mansfield. We will go to Mr Ettershank.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you all very much for your presentations today. It was very informative, and I think it was very consistent with the evidence that we heard at yesterday’s sittings in Sunbury. I guess one of the things that is, to my mind, extremely troubling is the complete lack of transparency and process behind this. Everyone is nodding, so I do not need to wait for your responses. I think that it is

extraordinary that so much is hidden. Then I think that was a further revelation today about the consortium where apparently they have all agreed to be gagged and preclude their own people – their own citizens and ratepayers – from knowing about it.

But I just want to come to one question, which is to me almost staggering as well – and I guess I am seeking some advice here. There has been all this talk about 2.5 million tonnes being burnt, based on I think it is the seven licences. But then there are also the existing licences, which is another over a million tonnes, and we are hearing very different things about that. Are there any insights as to whether we are going to be burning 2.5 million tonnes or 3.5 million tonnes, recognising I think that the state government policy is that we are only going to do 2.5 million tonnes? Has someone got some insights on that question?

**Chaz STREET:** Well, we have got this cap, supposedly. It started as a million tonnes. On 10 December 2024 it was raised to 2 million tonnes and then in July of 2025 it was raised to 2.5 million tonnes. I put to the panel the proposition that in practical terms de facto there is no cap. There is no cap; it is just a movable feast. The cap gets adjusted according to whatever the policy and the desires of the government might be, so the cap is nothing but window-dressing. That is our view.

**Cath ROUSE:** If I can just add to that, you are correct – it is an additional 2.5 million in the things that we have seen, but what is also a little bit scary is at the same time as they made the new cap licences they also increased the threshold for even being applicable to the cap, so you can start a plant at 70,000 tonnes a year, which is significant, and that is not even included.

**David ETTERS HANK:** It is not included in what way?

**Cath ROUSE:** Well, because it is in addition. There was a threshold for being under the cap of 30,000 tonnes a year, and that has been increased to 80,000 from my reading.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Okay. Max or Marion, have you got anything to add on this question?

**Marion CINCOTTA:** No. I am just pretty horrified. And it is not exactly pertinent to the question, but the statement that we are running out of landfill – that was the statement at the national waste summit by Recycling Victoria – is not true. Landfill is not great – it is not a great look – but these incinerators are much worse. I did not really answer the question.

**David ETTERS HANK:** A good point, nonetheless. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thanks, Mr Ettershank. We need to keep to time to keep to the schedule, so I might submit some questions on notice along with other members of the committee. Thank you so much for coming along and speaking with us today. It was a really valuable contribution, and I appreciate you all coming in person as well.

**Witnesses withdrew.**