



Locked Bag 3, Orbost
Victoria 3888 AUSTRALIA
eeg@eastgippsland.net.au
ABN: 30 865 568 417
www.eastgippsland.net.au

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Submission – Inquiry into recycling and waste management

Via email: recyclinginquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

And <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/954-epc-lc/inquiry-into-recycling-and-waste-management>

EEG is very pleased to see the establishment of this parliamentary enquiry into the growing problem of waste creation and Victoria's current inadequate recycling facilities.

General points:

- There is a growing public awareness and call for decent recycling facilities, reduced packaging, better waste management and more govt support.
- There is also a call for better air quality and use of resources, as well as less pollution and toxic waste while encouraging and supporting clean renewable energy.
- Wood and organic compostables can account for a large percentage of waste from household and industrial waste. Large composting systems could easily eliminate such waste and create valuable end products.
- There must be container deposit scheme – this is a no-brainer.
- A ban on single use plastics is urgently needed.
- Government procurement policy should incorporate prioritising recycled materials.
- Community education programs to encourage people to reduce, reuse, refuse and recycle should go hand-in-hand with other initiatives.
- We would like to see govt responding to voters' calls for more and better recycling and less unnecessary waste created instead of the continuing appeasement of the oil industry, packaging giants and other large influential industries such as Nippon's Australian Paper.

- We predict there will be growing concern and community opposition to the proposed rubbish incinerator at Maryvale and others around Victoria. They are a very expensive, backwards and unpopular solution to rubbish as we will detail below. Waste incinerators, regardless of any energy created for industry, are energy negative, counter-productive, expensive, add significant but avoidable greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere and are counter to a progression towards a circular economy and clean renewables. We strongly urge the government to cease its financing and advocacy for waste burners, especially at a time when reducing and recycling is now the direction for the 21st century.

The quick filthy fix should be rejected – Europe’s experience and new direction

As tempting as a waste incinerator might be to a desperate state government it would ultimately be a lose-lose situation for everyone but the international waste incineration industry.

Just as European countries are turning their back on and closing down waste incinerators, Australia and Victoria seem to be embracing them. The rejected incineration industry now appears to be looking for needy and naïve governments.

The European Union environment committee just voted to end all funding to incinerators -

<https://bit.ly/ENVlvsIncineration?fbclid=IwAR3vct7f4X1GBUpwwBQZUKXdy8TS-Ekw5shNFy9u4cInIOe5ZE fKw9nNuA>

The UK “*Without Incineration Network*” has recently released a new report on incineration and the negative climate impacts -

<http://ukwin.org.uk/climate/?fbclid=IwAR12HNQNvfzFBHZzLweF8g-1sT9f3JcSgS1rgsG-UYTL8j6O3bXivLRyXPE>

Incineration is extremely expensive and requires ongoing government subsidies which should instead be used for genuine renewables and to invest in a cleaner circular economy. Heading down a 1500s style of rubbish burning is a very bad investment. The UK has also proposed an incinerator tax -

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5964725/Councils-told-stop-burning-waste-MPs-want-introduce-incineration-tax.html>,

<http://ukwin.org.uk/2018/08/25/government-shortlists-incineration-tax-for-november-budget/>,

<http://ukwin.org.uk/2018/09/28/are-we-only-a-month-away-from-an-incineration-tax/>

There's also a mandate of the European Investment Bank to *de-fund* incineration

and align its funding policies with the higher levels in the hierarchy (reuse centers, separate collection, recycling and composting sites).

The EU *Plastic Strategy* (a document that frames strategies to tackle the "plastic plague") only mentions incineration once to highlight the (negative harmful) role of incinerating plastics as one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases.

The European Commission Communication on Waste to Energy from 26 Jan 2017, says there is a problematic role for incineration in a Circular Economy. The EU therefore defines what they call a "decommissioning strategy" for Countries with excess capacity such as Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, etc.), which includes:

- i) stopping subsidies
- ii) taxing incineration
- iii) moratorium on new ones
- iv) start shutting the existing ones down.

For countries without incinerators, it says "*before building one, consider what your waste will be not tomorrow, but in 20-30 years*". This statement coupled with the ongoing directions defined in the Circular Economy Package, jeopardises bankability of investments on incineration.

The EU Plastic Strategy (a document that frames strategies to tackle the "plastic plague") only mentions incineration once, to highlight the (**negative**) role of incinerating plastics as one of **largest emitters of GHGs**. This is counter to actions we must take to tackle climate change!

Connected to this, the ***Zero Waste Energy Report on Contribution of Waste Management*** to tackle decarbonisation of economy was published around the time of COP 21. The REPORT summarises hundreds of pages of science-based assessments and calculations. It favors waste reduction and recycling (reduction of GHGs) instead of incineration and landfilling (increase of Greenhouse gases). This is related to the "embedded energy" lost once resources are destroyed, since they must again be extracted, transported and processed into new primary raw materials, with a total energy input far greater than the amount of energy created through incineration.

Maryvale proposed waste incinerator – uneconomic and undermines recycling

The Nippon mill's Australian Paper, claims the price of gas is reducing its profitability as it is a major source of energy for the plant. The planned waste incinerator is estimated to cost \$600 million and we understand there is still uncertainty surrounding financing the incinerator and securing 25 year contracts from councils to also secure a reliable rubbish stream.

If built it would be like funding extremely expensive horse and cart technology as the world moves on to electric cars. It would also undermine the progress of a recycling industry. An incinerator would create a demand for 650,000m³ of rubbish every year to feed the furnaces. If undeliverable, this situation must not then create the need for a new feedstock of native forests, which Labor has recently endorsed. Biomass is also being rejected globally as an insanity at this critical time of climate emergency!

The incinerator must not rely on tax-payers to progress such an unpopular, unhealthy, climate negative and now extremely outdated method of waste disposal. \$600M could pay the gas bill of Nippon's mill for another 70 years.

Instead \$600M could be invested in a major solar farm to generate far in excess of the mill's energy needs. A 64ha solar farm established at nearby [Maffra](#) is a \$40-50M project and will produce 30 Mw/hr of power. This is exactly the same [estimated energy output](#) that the [Maryvale incinerator](#) will produce. However it will be for over 10 times the cost. We estimate much of the financial burden would fall onto tax-payers. We don't need another Wonthaggi desalination plant millstone around treasury's neck.

The disproportionate expense of building and maintaining waste incinerators is summed up by this quote from the County Commissioner Richard Schwartz, Lake County, Florida:

We can either send garbage to the incinerator or we can send dollar bills! That's what it amounts to.

A quote from the Wall Street Journal also reinforces this situation:

In hindsight, the public sector got most of the risks and the private sector most of the rewards in building waste to energy facilities.

In Europe the resistance has taken the form of implementing alternatives. Some areas have cut waste generation dramatically even as populations have climbed. As a result, there is almost no market for new incinerators in Europe.

MAV supports viable recycling action

EEG is very impressed with the Municipal Association of Victoria's recent two-page action plan directed to all three levels of government which encourages responsible management and recycling of resources.

Government action towards rescuing and advancing the recycling industry must see ambitious targets and timelines that fast-track the MAV's plan.

Sustainability Fund – don't throw \$ into the furnace

The half a billion dollars of landfill levy currently in the Sustainability Fund should be used to quickly progress various recycling initiatives and enterprises. EEG is adamant that it not be used to assist any of the state's planned waste incinerators or help fund their feasibility studies.

Daily the public is seeing the corruption and collusion between governments and the big end of town at the expense of communities, their health and the environment. Should the Sustainability Fund money be directed towards waste incinerators while a decent recycling industry languishes, it would send any environmental credibility of the government into a downward spiral.

EEG urges the government to fast track and kick-start recycling hubs across the state and disengage from further promotion of waste incinerators and their toxic legacy.

J Redwood
Coordinator