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Submission to NSW Select Committee on Proposed Energy from Waste Facilities

The creation of energy from waste facilities is not an effective 'solution' to managing residual waste. Rather than risking the health and environment of regional communities through these facilities, better solutions will focus on reducing the amount of residual waste produced in the first place.

October 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Australia Institute welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Select Committee on Proposed Energy from Waste Facilities. This submission principally relates to the terms-of-reference *(i) alternative solutions to reduce and manage residual waste produced by Greater Sydney* and *(j) any other related matters*.

AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE RESEARCH ON WASTE

Creating the proposed energy from waste facilities in New South Wales would undermine long-term efforts to improve waste management. The only long-term solution to managing residual waste produced by Greater Sydney is to reduce the production of residual waste. Effective long-term solutions would focus on ending the linear take-make-waste system of over-production and over-consumption and moving towards a genuinely circular economy.

We attach three Australia Institute reports on the issue of waste in Australia that are relevant to this committee:

- Plastic waste in Australia[1]
- Textiles waste in Australia[2]
- Food Waste in Australia[3]

These reports detail the scale of the issue of waste, recommend policy solutions and detail public support for these policy solutions. We have provided a brief summary of these reports below. As the policy recommendations in our reports were directed at the Commonwealth Government we have tailored the policy recommendations to actions that can be taken by the NSW Government.

REDBANK POWER STATION REFUSAL AND WASTE-TO-ENERGY

Proposals for waste-to-energy facilities are likely to go through the NSW planning process and be assessed by the Independent Planning Commission (IPC). As such, we wish to draw the Committee's attention to the reasoning of the IPC in refusing the application to restart the Redbank Power Station in the Hunter Valley using biomass.

Of particular importance is the IPC's statement that the Redbank fuel strategy was "central to the Commission's consideration of the application" and that refusal of the application was significantly related to "potential adverse impacts of the project relating to its fuel strategy."[4]

Many submitters to the Redbank proposal, including The Australia Institute, highlighted that a biomass burning project represented a significant source of demand for woodchips and other biomass. This demand had the potential to incentivise land clearing and native forest logging. The IPC agreed, finding "establish a new commercial incentive to increase land clearing to a rate materially greater than the average actual clearing rates".

The parallel with new energy from waste facilities is clear. Consideration of the projects' fuel strategies will be very important. The advent of a market for combustible

[1] Anderson and Gbor (2024) *Plastic waste in Australia*, https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/plastic-waste-in-australia/

[2] Gbor and Chollet (2024) *Textiles waste in Australia*, https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/textiles-waste-in-australia/

[3] Anderson et al (2023) *Food Waste in Australia*, https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/food-waste-in-australia/

[4] Independent Planning Commission (2025) *Restart of Redbank Power Station,* https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-09/250915_Redbank%20Restart_Statement%20of%20Reasons.pdf

waste may hamper waste reduction policies. Reducing the demand for (or reuse/recycling of) plastic and other fossil fuel-derived waste products will be more difficult if there is an industry able to profit from burning this plastic.

The best thing NSW can do to reduce waste is not to create it in the first place. The NSW Government could enact holistic policies to minimise or eliminate waste. This would save the NSW Government significant waste management costs, reduce emissions, and support the achievement of NSW Local and State Government environmental targets.

SUMMARY OF REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Plastic waste in Australia (2024)

Scale of the problem

- Since the year 2000, the total amount of plastic consumed in Australia has more than doubled. By 2049–50, plastic consumption will have increased by a further two-and-a-half times.
- Just 14% of plastic waste is kept out of landfill. Recycling plastic is expensive and hazardous, with little demand for recycled plastics.

Policy recommendations

The NSW Government should:

- **Work with the Commonwealth Government to implement a tax on virgin (non-recycled) plastic packaging.** If this tax was at the same rate as the European Union's tax, it would have raised $1.5 billion in 2020-21.
- **Implement extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes** so that a producer's responsibility for a product extends to the post-consumer stage of a product's life cycle. This scheme exists in the United Kingdom for all businesses with an annual turnover of £1 million and that are responsible for using 25 tonnes of plastic packaging or more.[5]

Public support

A clear majority of Australians support regulatory and legislative reforms that would reduce plastic waste beyond what currently exists including:

[5] Gov.UK (2025) *Extended producer responsibility for packaging: who is affected and what to do*, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/extended-producer-responsibility-for-packaging-who-is-affected-and-what-to-do

- Over four in five (85%) support legislated plastic waste reduction targets for producers, suppliers, and retailers;
- Four in five (80%) support laws phasing out the use of single-use plastics;
- Four in five (78%) support for banning plastic that cannot be recycled in the curbside bin; and
- Over four in five (86%) support laws requiring new plastic products to contain recycled plastic material.

Textiles Waste in Australia (2024)

Scale of the problem

- The average Australian buys 56 new items of clothing each year, which makes Australia the second largest consumer of clothing in the world per capita after the United States.
- Over 1.4 billion units of new clothing come onto the Australian market each year, and over 200,000 tonnes of clothing end up in landfills around Australia every year – this is almost four times the weight of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Policy recommendations

The NSW Government should:

- **Work with other jurisdictions to establish labelling standards** that inform consumers about the social and ecological footprint of the textiles they buy. This would be similar to the mandatory standards for care labelling that already exist in Australia.
- **Develop a plan for stronger textiles recycling** to cover the state's textile waste. This could be included within the strategic plan for waste and recycling infrastructure.
- **Encourage state government departments to have procurement policies** for the purchasing of products made from textiles recycled in Australia.
- **Provide tax incentives for businesses** that purchase materials made from textiles waste recycled in NSW.
- **Introduce subsidies for the cost of textile repairs** for consumers or introduce a state government-funded rebate scheme for textile repairs.
- **Work with the Commonwealth Government** to:
    - **Tax on 'fast fashion' items** put on the Australian market.
    - **Increase supply chain transparency** in the textiles industry.
    - **Regulate or ban advertising** of fast fashion.
    - **Ban the export of textile waste** from Australia within five years.
    - **Substantially invest in Australia's domestic recycling capacity**.

Public support

Australia Institute polling has demonstrated the popularity of several of these policy options among Australians, including:

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) are either somewhat concerned or very concerned about the environmental impact of textiles (which the polling question defined as clothes, shoes and bags).
- Nearly three-quarters (71%) think that the businesses that make or sell textiles should be responsible for eliminating textiles waste, nearly half (46%) said government should be responsible, and two-in-five (43%) said consumers.
- Two-thirds (66%) would get at least some of their clothes, shoes or bags repaired if the repair was eligible for a government-funded discount. This would be a significant increase on the two-fifths (39%) of people who said they currently do so.

Food waste in Australia (2023)

Scale of the problem

- A report commissioned by the Federal Government estimates that the country wasted 7.6 million tonnes of food in 2018-19, equivalent to 152 Sydney Harbour Bridges.
- International research suggests that between 10% and 63% of food waste is related to labelling.
- Around 10% of food waste is related to the cosmetic standards that retailers impose on fruit and vegetable growers.

Policy recommendations

The NSW Government should work across jurisdictions to:

- **Reform food labelling to eliminate the 'sell by' and 'display until' dates** that can mean perfectly good food goes to waste.
- **Reform food labelling to extend the allowable 'use by' dates for long-life products**. This labelling reform will eliminate confusion for customers and increase the length of time that good food is kept in use.

Polling

Opinion polling for this report shows that a clear majority of Australians support various regulatory reforms to reduce food waste—including:

- Four in five (78%) support reforming use-by and best-before date labelling
- Nearly three-quarters (72%) support for relaxed cosmetic standards.