

Media release

Minister Frydenberg burns Australia's renewable energy reputation with dirty waste to energy incineration 28th April 2018

“Burning waste for energy delivers neither clean nor renewable energy.”

Yesterday's meeting of Australian Ministers delivered some real progress on waste and recycling for Australia. However, giving renewable energy subsidies via the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) to the polluting waste incineration industry wasn't one of them.

Plastic which makes up a large percentage of municipal wastes is a fossil fuel- based material that when burnt releases a range of toxic air pollutants and greenhouse gases. Yet, the waste to energy incineration industry relies on the calorific value of plastic in the waste stream to be viable. This creates an incentive to divert plastic waste from safer, more sustainable waste management outcomes such as recycling and reusing, thereby undermining the goal of a circular economy – a key objective of the Federal Government's waste management agenda.

“Burning plastic waste also acts as a disincentive for industry to redesign their plastic products and materials for improved recycling and reuse. Most importantly burning waste for energy contributes more greenhouse gases (GHGs) and toxic air pollutants per unit of energy than coal, oil or gas. It therefore makes no sense to award this industry clean renewable energy subsidies and will only divert funds from proven renewable energy technologies at a time when we need them the most,” said Jane Bremmer NTN Zero Waste Coordinator.

“Burning residual waste also destroys the opportunity to use organic waste such as food, green wastes, cardboard, paper etc for more ecologically sustainable purposes such as compost. It's another perverse outcome to squander these organic resources for minimal amounts of dirty energy when our farming industry and environment needs these organic wastes for essential nutrients and Soil Organic Carbon – a more sustainable way to also sequester carbon back into our environment at this critical time of climate change threats.” Said Dr Lloyd-Smith, Senior Advisor, National Toxics Network.

Incineration is classified as a prime source of the very toxic persistent organic pollutants (POPs) to the global environment. Under the Stockholm Convention to which Australia is a signatory, all efforts must be made to eliminate their release. The EU recently voted to end all subsidies to the waste incineration industry and Australia is out of step with both the US and EU on the classification of waste incineration as a renewable energy source.

Communities in Australia have consistently rejected Waste to Energy incineration. Recently the NSW government agencies of planning, health and environment, NSW EPA and a NSW parliamentary inquiry unanimously rejected a massive incineration project planned for Eastern Creek announcing it was not in the public interest. <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/News/2018/Planning-assessment-finds-the-proposed-energy-from-waste-facility-should-be-refused>

“This industry has no social licence to operate in Australia. Minister Frydenberg needs to put the health and wellbeing of the Australian people and our environment ahead of the profits for the plastics and chemical industry and pursue a sustainable zero waste policy agenda to achieve a circular economy.” States Jane Bremmer

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Further Information

The EU recently voted to end all subsidies to the waste incineration industry

<https://zerowasteurope.eu/2018/01/the-european-parliament-halts-perverse-subsidies-to-energy-from-mixed-waste/>

<https://www.recycling-magazine.com/2018/01/17/european-parliament-halts-perverse-subsidies-energy-mixed-waste/>

They state: Support schemes for electricity from renewable sources should not undermine the principles of the circular economy and the waste hierarchy which rank waste management options according to their sustainability and give the highest priority to preventing and recycling of waste. As noted in the Commission Communication of 27 January 2017 on “The role of waste to energy in the circular economy”, recovery of energy from waste in the Union should support the objectives of the circular economy action plan and should be firmly guided by the Union’s waste hierarchy. Therefore, as of 2021, Member States should not be allowed to provide financial support for the incineration of municipal waste.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-604.700%2b01%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>

Europe recognises the role that waste incineration has had in undermining the recycling sector and has legislated to address this.

“Public funding should also avoid creating overcapacity for non-recyclable waste treatment such as incinerators. In this respect it should be borne in mind that mixed waste as a feedstock for waste-to-energy processes is expected to fall as a result of separate collection obligations and more ambitious EU recycling targets. For these reasons, Member States are advised to gradually phase-out public support for the recovery of energy from mixed waste.”

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/waste-to-energy.pdf>

In the US 250 Mayors recently voted to prevent renewable energy subsidies for waste incineration after a push by the industry to have them classified as renewable energy generators.

http://www.no-burn.org/incinerators_denied/