

World Environment Day 2018

A global consensus call to stop waste to energy incineration in Australia.

On this World Environment Day 2018, the National Toxics Network together with the support of local, state, national and international zero waste organisations and individuals are demanding an end to the Australian governments plans to establish the waste to energy incineration industry in Australia.

Federal Environment Minister, Josh Frydenberg's recent announcement to fund waste to energy technologies through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is a major step in the wrong direction for Australia's waste and recycling crisis.

Waste to energy incineration is not clean and cannot provide renewable energy. Simply, burning recyclable and reusable materials, organic wastes and fossil fuel-based plastic makes no sense. We can manage these wastes without creating tonnes of toxic ash and air pollution, harming communities and imposing long term financial burdens on local and state governments, instead preserving the value and embedded energy of these resources and creating comparably many more jobs through downstream economies.

Waste to energy incineration is at odds with the goal of a circular economy, sustainable closed loop systems of materials production and the protection of human rights and our shared environment.

While the world is grappling with a plastic pollution crisis that has seen almost every corner of our planet contaminated with plastic debris and microplastic pollutants, super toxified with dangerous Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the solution to this global problem will not be resolved through more fossil fuelled plastic waste burning. Waste to energy incinerators are the second largest contributor of POPs to our global environment and contaminate air, food, water and human health, ironically adsorbing onto the very microplastics that have contaminated our marine environment and food chain. Entrenching a linear economic system of raw materials extraction, production, consumption and disposal through burning our waste, will undermine Australia's hopes for a circular economy, while sustaining the plastic and chemical industry's product design failures, ensuring business as usual especially for the packaging industry. Burning non-recyclable, multilayered, single use plastic waste for energy is not recycling. It is nothing more than burning fossil fuels in highly complex chemical mixtures creating highly complex, toxic and hazardous chemical pollution.

Australia is at a cross roads. Ahead is the opportunity to implement sustainable zero waste policies across the country that will create jobs, keep our environment clean, give increased value to our finite resources and put us in line with the progressive policy directions being taken in the EU, US and Asia Pacific region. In some of the most vulnerable and adversely impacted parts of the world – India, Indonesia and the Philippines, work is well underway to stop the tide of plastic pollution without incineration through dedicated community led zero waste programmes. Today on this World Environment Day, we have so much to gain by supporting sustainable Zero Waste Policy and so much to lose if we ignore the evidence or harm and pursue a dead-end waste burning agenda.

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