



Request to correct testimony by Blue Mountains Unions and Community

We acknowledge
the traditional owners of the Blue Mountains,
the Darug and Gundungurra peoples.



Dear Mr Palthorpe

I recently appeared before the Senate Inquiry into waste reduction and recycling. I would like to correct and/or clarify some of the information I provided. I have already provided a proofread copy of the transcript but it was not appropriate to provide the following information in the corrected transcript. The intent of this letter is not to correct the record of what I said, but to correct the accuracy of what I said.

Waste to Energy Incinerator in the Lithgow area.

The initial proposal, dating back to 2016, for a waste to energy incinerator was at Mount Piper where there is a coal fired power station, scheduled to close in the early 2040's. This proposal was a joint project between Energy Australia and Re.Group. It didn't go ahead after Energy Australia withdrew from the joint venture.

I was unable to answer the question about whether there were plans to sell energy from the waste to energy plant but have found this information since, which may be helpful. According to a report published by the project partners in December 2021, *"Under the current study, the Project has determined that the integration of an EfW plant into the existing Mt Piper coal fired power station is not feasible and will not be supported by the proponents going forward. The key driver that resulted in this determination is the changing energy landscape in NSW and the proponents' ability to secure a long term steam offtake for the Project."*^[1] Re.Group were reported in the media as "exploring options to enable a modified version of the project to proceed".^[2]

In 2022 another proposal for a waste to energy incinerator at nearby Wallerawang by Greenspot (with Cleanaway) was rejected by the NSW Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).^[3] This was to be sited at an old, now closed, coal fired power station. Wallerawang is very close to Mount Piper, but not within "West Lithgow Precinct". In 2022 the NSW government declared that waste to energy development is restricted to four regional areas. The West Lithgow Precinct is one of these.^[4]

Mount Piper falls within the West Lithgow Precinct, so future proposals for waste to energy incinerators at that site could still be considered.

In both cases the waste would be from Sydney and in both cases the Lithgow community opposed the proposals, including representatives from Lithgow City Council.

In 2021 Mayor Ray Thompson said, about the Mount Piper proposal, *"Let's face it, it was not a waste to energy*

thing, you know, it's an incinerator to get rid of Sydney's waste, there's no risk in the world that that's the push."

"If they build one in Sydney's backyard and prove that they're okay. Well then, the rural regional areas can have a look at it. But until they do that, it's alright to be spruiking the goods in that they can build them all around the world, and they're in big cities - well, build one in Sydney. Sydney is the one creating the waste."

In 2022 Deputy Mayor Cassandra Coleman said, about the Wallerawang proposal, "As one of the councillors who voted to stop the inclusion of the site, I don't think it should have ever been considered it wasn't something we wanted, it's not good for Lithgow and clearly the EPA agree,"

The submission made to this Inquiry by the Lithgow Environment Group, and Lithgow City Councillors, express opposition to the Western Lithgow precinct as well.

While I understand with the sentiments of Mayor Ray Thompson's opinion that safety should be proven in Sydney first, my personal experience leads me to have reservations.

Coincidentally, before moving to the Blue Mountains in the mid 1990's I lived in Portman St, Zetland across the road from the Waterloo Incinerator, which was owned by Waverley and Woollahra Councils but operated in the South Sydney Council LGA, near the poorer communities of Redfern, Waterloo and Alexandria.^[5]

That incinerator was built in the 1960's and, in another coincidence, I attended Waverley Public School and remember a person from Waverley Council telling my class what a good thing the incinerator would be for us in Waverley. It remained in my memory because I couldn't understand why it was thought that primary school children of the 1960s would be interested.

I'm unable to find information to confirm which council areas were served by the Waterloo incinerator apart from Waverley and Woollahra, but I believe Randwick, Botany and one other council disposed of waste there. The waste produced by the residents of South Sydney Council went elsewhere. Acknowledging that waste to energy incinerators are probably technologically superior to the old Waterloo incinerator, I believe that Mr Thompson's proposition that an incinerator should be tested on Sydney residents first would result in a similar situation, with the experiment being conducted on poorer areas of Sydney excluding wealthier and more influential areas.

Air Watch Blue Mountains and Lithgow Project

I was unable to answer a question about the pollutants measured by the PurpleAir monitors BMUC has installed from Lithgow, Portland and Dargan in the west to Lapstone in the east.

According to the PurpleAir website^[6]:

*"PurpleAir sensors primarily measure **particulate matter (PM)** between 0.3µm and 10µm in diameter. This information can then be used when estimating PM levels.*

PM estimates provided by PurpleAir sensors include:

- *PM1 - this includes particulates up to 1µm in diameter*
- *PM2.5 - this includes particulates up to 2.5µm in diameter*
- *PM10 - this includes particulates up to 10µm in diameter*

PM2.5 and PM1 estimates from PurpleAir sensors have been found to be highly precise. However, it has been demonstrated that they drastically underestimate PM10 pollution levels.

If something is outside the size range detected by the sensor's laser counters (0.3-10µm), it may not be detected. If something is above 2.5µm, it may also be underrepresented or not detected."

Action by Blue Mountains City Council Workers Against Asbestos Mismanagement

At the hearing I incorrectly stated that workers had taken action against BMCC regarding asbestos at the Blaxland tip.

The dispute I was thinking of took place in 2016 or 17 and related to practices going back to 2012. The council faced being placed into administration over allegations of mismanagement of asbestos, however this was not at the Blaxland tip.

There was asbestos at an old Blackheath tip, a stockpile at Lawson and council properties at Katoomba/Leura preschool, Warrimoo Hall, Springwood Depot, the small vehicle tip at Katoomba and in Currawong Ave in Valley Heights.

The United Services Union acted on behalf of workers. The dispute was quite controversial at the time, with the acting General Manager standing down, and radio shock jock Ray Hadley interviewing the USU and Greens Councillor Kerry Brown and calling for the resignation of Mayor Mark Greenhill.^[7]

A long running Inquiry by the NSW Office of Local Government *"found that failings in asbestos management prior to mid-2017 have since been remedied by the council and there is no basis for its dismissal"*.^[8]

Thank you for this opportunity to correct and clarify the information I've provided. I've also attached a docx version of the content of this email and pdf versions of the links in the footnotes.

Yours sincerely

Debra Smith
Secretary

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[1] [Mount Piper Energy Recovery Final Public Report.](#)

[2] [Lithgow Residents to Breathe Easy After Waste to Energy Scrapped.](#) Lithgow Mercury 25/11/2021

[3] [Energy from Waste proposal appears dead as Toole announces EPA decision on controversial plan.](#) Lithgow Mercury 24/5/2022

[4] [Is it fair to turn regional areas into a 'dumping ground' for Sydney's rubbish?](#) ABC News 10/4/2022

[5] [Tracing the Troubled Past of the Waterloo Incinerator in Zetland.](#) Redfern News 18/4/2023

[6] [What Do PurpleAir Sensors Measure and How Do They Work?](#)

[7] [Blue Mountains Council acting general manager stands down over asbestos.](#) 13/11/2017

[8] [Blue Mountains councillors cleared after inquiry into asbestos crisis](#) Sydney Morning Herald 25/3/2021

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