

Incinerator creates a stir

The controversial waste-to-energy plant mooted for Dandenong South created news throughout 2020.

On 25 February the Star Journal reported that the proposal had been met by an overwhelming public backlash from hundreds of residents over air quality and health concerns.

Residents - as close as 1.4 kilometres from the plant - wrote letters and signed petitions, decrying the 70 Ordish Road site's proximity to Dandenong Creek, schools, colleges, kindergartens, places of worship and homes.

A 280-signature petition's covering letter stated homes were already impacted by two waste-related facilities, an organics garden and a commercial and industrial waste facility.

"Local residents have already made numerous complaints and reports to local council and EPA regarding the weird smells around our area.

"This (waste-to-energy plant) will definitely make the situation worse."

A Keysborough South resident wrote that the proposal would "literally shatter mine and so many other families' dreams".

"How can our kids still go to the local parks where there is air pollution, weird smells?"

In May Greater Dandenong councillors voted to oppose a VCAT planning permit application for the incinerator.

They unanimously rejected a council planning officer's report recommending support for the Great Southern Waste Technologies proposal at the VCAT hearing on 27 July.

In a motion at a 11 May council meeting, Cr Matthew Kirwan said it was the "only responsible decision" given public concerns and that the Environment Protection Authority had not yet assessed the human health and environmental impacts.

On 21 May the state's pollution watchdog



Great Southern Waste Technologies executive general manager Stuart Gilbert and chief operating officer Bill Keating with the proposed waste-to-energy plant.

Environment Protection Authority Victoria publicly released the further information.

As requested, proponent Great Southern Waste Technologies provided more information including emissions rates, odour impacts and accidental or emergency emission releases.

The incinerator would annually process 100,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste and commercial and industrial waste.

It would generate about 7.9 MegaWatts of power into the grid - suffice for about 7000 homes and businesses.

GSWT submitted that the plant's "clean" gasification technology met European Union standards and would have negligible impact on human health.

On 28 July the Journal reported that the plant

had been granted works approval by the EPA.

The applicant Great Southern Waste Technologies was granted approval for the 70 Ordish Road gasification incinerator with "stringent conditions", according to an EPA statement on 21 July.

The project still required planning approval - a matter which will be heard at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 27 July.

In its findings, the EPA stated the "potential air emissions ... pose negligible risk to human health".

Greater Dandenong Council then sought to defer the VCAT hearing. VCAT refused the council's request, but granted the council two weeks to submit further opposing arguments against the plant.

Mayor Jim Memeti said the council "vigorously" opposed the plant on behalf of residents during the four-day VCAT hearing.

Just weeks later, VCAT granted a planning permit on 15 September.

VCAT members Jeanette Rickards and Greg Sharpley stated the proposed waste-to-energy facility will "go some way to reducing waste to go to landfill".

"We do not consider that the use will impact on the amenity of the nearby local community," they stated - noting the Environment Protection Authority Victoria had granted works approval.

Greater Dandenong appealed the approval with a hearing expected in February.