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OBJECT

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Organisation: <i>N/A</i>	Key issues: <i>Social impacts</i>
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Attachment: <i>Attached overleaf</i>	

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Please see attached document

To the Members of the Independent Planning Commission,

I write to express my deep concern and opposition to the proposed Plasrefine plant in Moss Vale. As a social worker with over 20 years of experience in child protection and child safety, I am particularly alarmed by the lack of consideration given to the impact this development will have on children living in the Southern Highlands. This proposal represents a serious and unacceptable risk to their health, safety, and well-being, which extends beyond Moss Vale to the entire region, including its families, ecosystems, and water catchments.

Children are among the most vulnerable members of our society. We have a moral and legal obligation to prioritize their protection from harm, including environmental hazards. Poisoning the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the soil where they grow and play is a direct violation of this responsibility.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which Australia is a signatory, children are entitled to the following fundamental rights:

1. The right to live in a safe and healthy environment (Article 24): Approving a plant that will release microplastics and toxic chemicals directly contradicts this obligation. Scientific evidence shows that nanoplastics—the smallest and most damaging forms of plastic pollution—are almost impossible to capture. They accumulate in human organs, including the lungs, liver, brain, and reproductive systems, and have even been found in placentas and breastmilk, exposing babies from the very start of life.

2. The right to have their voices heard in matters that affect them (Article 12): Children and young people in Moss Vale and the Southern Highlands deserve to be consulted about a proposal that will directly impact their community and environment.

Health Risks for Children

Recent studies have revealed alarming evidence about the health risks associated with plastic exposure, particularly for children:

- Infants have been found to have 10 to 20 times more microplastics in their feces compared to adults.
- Children under six are especially at risk, as they inhale up to three times more microplastics than adults and ingest significantly more due to behaviors like frequent hand-to-mouth activities.

Chronic exposure to microplastics can contribute to various health issues in children, including:

- Asthma and respiratory infections
- Inflammation in the lungs and gastrointestinal tract
- Potential long-term risks of heart disease and cancer
- Neurotoxic effects on developing brains, as nano-sized plastics can cross the blood-brain barrier

A recent study (2024) found that human brain samples contained up to 30 times more microplastics than other organs, with levels rising significantly in recent years.

Environmental Impact

The proposed Plasrefine plant poses significant threats to the local environment:

- Contamination of soil and water bodies, potentially harming local agriculture and food safety
- Disruption of ecosystems, affecting wildlife and biodiversity
- Persistent pollution, as plastics can take hundreds of years to degrade

The Wingecarribee Local Council has already objected to the Plasrefine development, noting that the Moss Vale Sewage Treatment Plant has no capacity to remove microplastics. As a result, treated effluent containing microplastics would inevitably enter the Sydney Water Drinking Catchment, threatening the health and safety of everyone who relies on this critical resource.

Safety Concerns

If a fire were to occur at the Plasrefine plant—which will store up to 20,000 tonnes of plastic—no filtration measures could prevent catastrophic plastic and chemical pollution from entering the surrounding air and waterways. Such a disaster would have long-lasting and irreversible effects on the health and safety of children and families across the region. Additionally, The Southern Highlands Fire Brigade doesn't have any means to fight a fire of such scale, and by the time support units from nearby areas reach the facility, significant health damage will be done to all those exposed to the toxic smoke, especially children.

Economic and Practical Considerations

It's important to note that plastic recycling is often not economically viable. Recycled plastic frequently costs more than new plastic due to the expensive processes of collecting, sorting, transporting, and reprocessing plastic waste. Chemical recycling, often promoted as a solution, has been shown to be ineffective and potentially harmful:

- It is inefficient and energy-intensive, contributing to climate change
- Even at full capacity, chemical recycling facilities in the U.S. would handle less than 1.3% of the plastic waste generated annually
- The process emits toxic waste, including carcinogenic compounds, volatile organic compounds, and dioxins

Community Consultation

As a social worker and a parent, I have liaised closely with a number of local schools regarding the implications of this facility on their students. Alarmingly, many schools were unaware of the proposal, highlighting a significant gap in community consultation. Even more concerning is that some schools revealed they had been advised by their governing boards not to protest or distribute information about the facility to their students or school families. I can only presume this reluctance stems from fears of losing funding, which raises serious ethical concerns about the transparency and fairness of the consultation process.

Conclusion

Building this plant in Moss Vale sends a clear message to our children: that corporate interests outweigh their right to grow up in a safe, healthy environment.

This is unacceptable. As members and adults of this community, we must place their needs first.

In considering this proposal, I urge the Commission to think not only about today but about the legacy we leave for future generations. Our actions now will determine whether Moss Vale and the Southern Highlands remain safe and thriving places for children and families or become examples of environmental neglect. Rejecting the Plasrefine plant would demonstrate our collective commitment to safeguarding children's health, protecting their rights under the UNCRC, and listening to the concerns of the community, including its youngest members.

I respectfully request that the Independent Planning Commission reject this proposal in the best interest of Moss Vale, the Southern Highlands, and the environment as a whole.

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