Transcript

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Compere:	**WENDY HARMER AND ROBBIE BUCK**	Summary ID:	**X00073507451**

Item: **INTERVIEW WITH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR BERNADETTE MCCABE, PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND, ABOUT THE RESULTS FROM THE NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ENERGY-FROM-WASTE TECHNOLOGY.**

INTERVIEWEE: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR BERNADETTE MCCABE, PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND.

Audience:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people
	34000	43000	78000

ROBBIE BUCK: Let's take a look at the technology itself and how it's operated and, indeed, if there are risks to it. Associate Professor Bernadette McCabe is a principal scientist at the University of Southern Queensland. She was actually involved in the New South Wales parliamentary inquiry into energy from waste technology, which took place last year.

Bernadette, good morning.

BERNADETTE MCCABE: Good morning.

ROBBIE BUCK: Yeah, okay. You've heard what Stephen Bali has to say about his concerns. Tell us about the technology.

BERNADETTE MCCABE: When you're talking about the broad area of waste to energy there are a number of technologies. But if we look particularly at combustion or - otherwise known

as incineration - it is the burning of non-recyclables. And I pick up the point non-recyclables because Stephen mentioned about, you know, if you put in these facilities, then what impact does that have on recycling rates. I just wanted to pick that up, just while it's fresh in my mind.

WENDY HARMER: That's right. Well, yeah, Bernadette, I'm just back from Japan, where all your household waste that is non-recyclable - and we're talking about the plastic packaging on biscuits or whatever that might be - that is all taken to the incinerator. Can you tell us where around the world is this technology employed and how is it working?

BERNADETTE MCCABE: Yeah. So if we look, predominantly coming out of Europe, and also North America, USA would have about upwards of 70 plus incineration plants, although that is pretty much steady at the moment because they are looking at other technologies which are more suitable - which I could go on about later on - but those countries in Europe which employ incineration are doing so because it is the last possible way of using those non-recyclables because they would have, say, bans on landfill. So there's different motivations, obviously, because we don't have such bans.

ROBBIE BUCK: Yeah. What comes out at the chimney? I mean what's expected to float across the suburbs around it?

BERNADETTE MCCABE: Given that the- and I would pick up on Steve's point about best practice. So, the advancements that have come out of Europe and employing those technologies

is such that it is relatively clean. There is- you'll see incineration stacks, say, in the middle of Vienna, for instance, which are- they're dominant and are safe, but they do have standards such that they are not going to pose a hazard. That's an important component.

WENDY HARMER: Alright, can I ask you to weigh this up then, Bernadette? If you were to plump for one of these, would you rather see that non-recyclable go into landfill? Or do you think that perhaps we would have fewer emissions if we - and create energy - if we employed this incinerator technology? Where do you stand on it?

BERNADETTE MCCABE: It is about fit for purpose. If I'm looking at, you know, this thing called waste hierarchies which is trying to get recovery from that waste as much as you can in terms of an economic standpoint, and also environmental. So if you were to be able to get electricity, for instance, from a non-recyclable and it's environmentally friendly, then, yes, I would go for a technology which combusts that to avoid landfill.

ROBBIE BUCK: Can I ask you- when you say environmentally friendly, would you be happy to have one next to your place?

BERNADETTE MCCABE: [Laughs] Look, I wouldn't have a problem, no. Because coming from scientific evidence, it would mean that the emissions are safe. I work not in the area of incineration, but rather in other technology which converts organic waste to energy. That is anaerobic digestion. So yeah, that technology can come under

scrutiny as well in the public, but if run properly and under compliance, then there's no issue.

ROBBIE BUCK: Okay. I guess for a lot of people, when they think of incinerators they think of, you know, memories of the 1970s in Australia where in the back yard there was a besser block spot and every [indistinct]…

WENDY HARMER: Forty-four gallon drum.

ROBBIE BUCK: Yeah. And dad would say: well, we've got a few cardboard boxes there. You know where that's going, and it's straight down to the back yard. And, of course, he'd burn it, and there'd be plumes of smoke floating across into the neighbour's house. And then he'd throw the plastic on because, well, why not. I mean we're going to get rid of it, aren't we? And the smell of- the caustic smell of the plastic burning and burn everybody's noses. There's probably a certain level of sense that, you know, that's just- these modern incinerators are just done on a larger scale. I guess, just getting to the heart of it though, really, is do we know for sure that what's going to come out of it isn't going to be deleterious, isn't going to affect those people around them?

BERNADETTE MCCABE: Well, as I said, it has to be the right technology and there have been a lot of advancements in cleaning up emissions from dioxins and the like. And as you say, you know, we were all part of that burning. We were quite happy to stand around the incinerator to get the fumes from there. But you know, the modern

	combustion facilities in Europe are, I would say, at a standard which is very strict and [indistinct]…
WENDY HARMER:	[Interrupts] Okay.
ROBBIE BUCK:	Okay, all right. Hey, thank you so much for your time this morning, Bernadette.
BERNADETTE MCCABE:	Thank you.
ROBBIE BUCK:	Associate Professor, Bernadette McCabe. She's the principal scientist at the University of Southern Queensland, and was actually involved in the New South Wales parliamentary inquiry into this very same technology, the energy from waste technology, last year. So that's her points on it.

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