

To: Director – Energy Assessments
Development Assessment
Department of Planning and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

Name: Graham Crane
Address: 33 Sequoia Drive, Moore Creek 2340
Name of Project: Middlebrook Solar Farm
Application No: SSD-10455

I do not require my details to be withheld.

I declare I have made no reportable political donations in the last two years.

I acknowledge and accept the Department's disclaimer and declaration.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTION

I object to the proposed Middlebrook Solar Farm development for the below reasons.

Loss of agricultural land

I am a retired farmer. My wife and I now own a rural residential property in the Tamworth Regional Council area. Until 2016 we owned a property on Marsden Park Road and still regularly visit the valley that will be impacted by the Middlebrook Solar Farm. I am very concerned about the loss of high-quality primary production land. The valley is full of highly developed and productive farming land and is therefore a highly inappropriate place for an industrial development of this nature.

Loss of rural character

I am worried about the potential impact of the proposed industrial development on the area's rural character and peaceful atmosphere. Based on the EIS, it seems that the scenic farmland vista locals currently enjoy will be replaced by extensive solar panels spread across hundreds of hectares, along with a substation and associated infrastructure on a sizable 600ha site. This could significantly alter the aesthetics of the neighbourhood and may affect the livelihood and well-being of the hardworking farmers who reside and operate in the vicinity.

I am particularly concerned that the impacts of the substation and the carpark mentioned in the Traffic Impact Assessment do not appear to have been adequately addressed in the Visual Impact Statement (VIA), which focuses only on the expanse of the solar panels themselves. I am familiar with the industrial character of several other substations in the region and believe that its impact should be considered properly. As I have indicated, I used to live in the valley and I am worried that the photo montages used in the VIA do not accurately represent the affected views. For these reasons, the Department should require a peer review of the VIA to ensure that damage to the rural character of the valley is accurately ascertained before deciding whether or not to approve the development.

Dust impacts

The developer seems to underestimate the impacts on locals and local agriculture of the dust that will be generated by the digging and increased traffic, particularly during the construction phase of the project. Middlebrook Road and Marsden Park Road are dry dirt roads and any vehicles travelling on them stir up large plumes of dust. In addition, I note that

the proposal includes plans for an additional 48km of internal roads, plus an unspecified number of internal vehicle movements per day.

As a farmer, I am aware that dust impedes plant growth, is detrimental to weed control, is damaging for livestock health. I am also anxious about the impact it will have on the physical health of friends in the valley who, as farmers and contractors, work outside and will be inhaling the dust.

I understand that the proponent intends to address these issues by trucking in water to dampen the dirt roads. I am doubly concerned about this approach, as it will put pressure on the local town water supply and increase traffic on the New England Highway. Instead, at the very least, any approval of this development should require both Middlebrook and Marsden Park roads to be upgraded to bitumen and maintained by the proponent.

Road condition impacts

The EIS does not adequately address the impacts of the increased traffic movements on the local road network. Middlebrook Road is often in poor condition, particularly after rain or heavy vehicle movements. The EIS notes a substantial number of heavy vehicle movements during the construction period which will cause degradation to the road surface – a major inconvenience to local landholders. This is not adequately dealt with in the proposal.


The proposal also focuses on Middlebrook Road, assuming that all traffic will access the development site via that route. However, the EIS sets out no enforcement mechanism to back up this assumption. As someone familiar with the local roads, it seems highly likely that vehicle movements will also increase on Marsden Park Road, as it is the more convenient access for anyone coming from Calala, Nemingha, Loomberah, Dungowan or the Armidale side of Tamworth.

These considerations add further weight to the need for both Marsden Park Road and Middlebrook Road to be upgraded to bitumen. In addition, for the safety of all residents of the region as well as through-traffic, the developer should be required to construct a left turn lane off the New England Highway (southbound).

Stress to nearby landholders and impact on way of life

Properties are the main asset for farmers. Their farms are usually their workplace, recreation spot and refuge. The change in the character of their valley, the increased traffic and other concerns I have raised above will have a huge impact on the local farmers.

Many farmers are already suffering succession planning problems due to the attractions of urban life for their children. The disruption to the farming lifestyle in the Marsden Park and Middlebrook Road area will likely worsen these problems for nearby landholders. I am already aware of members of the younger generation who have indicated they will consider moving away if the project goes ahead. Further, adult children who would otherwise visit their family farms regularly will be less likely to do so given the less appealing setting, dust, noise and traffic caused by the project. This would be detrimental to the family lives of those in the area.


Graham Crane