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24 May 2019

Minister for Planning
c/- Director, Resource and Energy Assessments
Department of Planning and Environment
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Attention: Natasha Homsey
Sent via email – natasha.homsey@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Natasha

**RE: Submission – Wollar Solar Farm Environmental Impact Statement
[SSD-9254]**

The Wilpinjong Coal Mine is located approximately 40 kilometres north-east of Mudgee within the Mid-Western Regional Local Government Area, in central New South Wales (NSW) and is owned and operated by Wilpinjong Coal Pty Ltd (WCPL).

WCPL has reviewed key aspects of the Wollar Solar Farm EIS that has recently been on public exhibition as well as regulatory advice to the Department on the application, and has identified the following items of concern but does not object to the proposal. WCPL notes that the proposal is largely located on private land, but Wollar Solar Development Pty Ltd (WSD) also seeks an easement over adjoining land owned by Peabody Pastoral Holdings Pty Ltd (a related body corporate of WCPL) for site access purposes.

Potential Mining Developments in the Vicinity of the Solar Farm

WCPL notes that WSD has consulted with the Geological Survey of NSW with respect to the Exploration Licence 6676 which is held by the State of NSW and overlies the Wollar Solar Farm Development Application area.

Further, the Wollar Solar Farm EIS (WSD, 2019) states:

MINING AND EXPLORATION

The Proposal would be likely to preclude the extraction of mineral resources from the site for the life of the solar farm. The Proposal would not prevent future resource exploitation following decommissioning of the solar farm

The Department may be aware that on 3 May 2019 WCPL made an operational allocation application under the *Mining Act, 1992* seeking an extension of its mining tenements to incorporate additional exploration areas to the north, south and east of Wollar (i.e. in Exploration Licence 6676).

WCPL's proposed operational allocation area does not overlie the Wollar Solar Farm development application area but is located to the north of it. Should WCPL's current application be successful and subsequent exploration activities demonstrate a viable project coal resource, WCPL intends to seek environmental approvals for development of open cut coal resources in the proposed allocation area.

WCPL is therefore concerned that the Wollar Solar Farm may pose a future constraint on open cut mining operations should a mine extension be approved (i.e. due to general mining operations or blasting activities potentially being constrained by the location and design of the Wollar Solar Farm, or dust deposition concerns).

WCPL therefore suggests the Division of Resources and Geoscience consider whether the Wollar Solar Farm should be conditioned so as not to constrain any approved future open cut extraction in Exploration Licence 6676.

Traffic and Traffic Noise

The Wilpinjong Coal Mine (in conjunction with Mid-Western Regional Council, Ulan Mine Complex and Moolarben Coal Complex) makes financial contributions proportionate to its share of mining-related traffic on Ulan Road in accordance with the Ulan Road Strategy, which is funding significant road upgrades and ongoing road maintenance on Ulan Road. As you would be aware, WCPL is also progressively upgrading the previously unsealed sections of Ulan-Wollar Road over the course of 2019.

WCPL has had some difficulty in interpreting the construction traffic generation described in the Wollar Solar Farm EIS. WCPL notes that the traffic volumes described in the following tables presented in Section 8 of the EIS appear to vary materially:

- Table 8-22 provides a sum of 64 average hourly movements (i.e. in and out), which appears to have been the basis of traffic noise calculations including peak hour traffic noise calculations for Barrigan Road.
- Table 8-31 appears to provide incoming vehicle numbers in the middle column (i.e. one-way movements) with daily trip generation of 192 and peak hour movement generation of 98 in the third column (i.e. both directions is inferred from the text).
- Table 8-33 describes future AM peak hour volumes on Barrigan Road of 95 southbound and 25 northbound.

WCPL notes that if Table 8-33 is correct, then the peak hour traffic noise generation for private receivers on Barrigan Road (i.e. a local road) would appear to be in the night-time period (i.e. before 7am) and the projected traffic levels would be approximately double those described in Table 8-22.

It is suggested that the projected peak hours traffic levels of the Wollar Solar Farm are clarified for assessment and communication purposes.

The assessment of traffic impacts for the Wollar Solar Farm states the following with respect to the source of materials and the route to the Wollar Solar Farm site (WSD, 2019):

It is expected that the haulage route for most vehicles, including heavy and dimensional vehicles, during construction would be from Mudgee then north to the site via Castlereagh Highway, Wollar Road and Barigan Road. It is expected that the equipment would be transported from port facilities in either Sydney or Newcastle and delivered to the site in 12m shipping containers. The larger transformers would likely be delivered by low loaders on up to four occasions.

Table 8-32 of the EIS also details 90% of construction trips originating from Mudgee.

WCPL notes that its experience with major deliveries from the ports to the Wilpinjong coal mine have typically utilised the Golden Highway, the northern section of Ulan Road and Ulan-Wollar Road (including shipments sourced from Newcastle or from Port Botany). This is generally preferred to transporting large loads through the Sydney urban area and on to Mudgee via the Blue Mountains.

WCPL therefore suggests that the potential for a significant proportion of Wollar Solar Farm delivery traffic to utilize the northern section of Ulan Road and potentially also Ulan-Wollar Road should be considered, as it may be a preferred delivery route for larger vehicles (e.g. B-Doubles).

Irrespective of the delivery routes adopted, WCPL suggests that the Mid-Western Regional Council should seek appropriate financial contributions from the Wollar Solar Farm to road maintenance costs on the local road network reflective of its road usage.

Road Upgrade Proponent

Section 4.4.4 of the EIS describes the following:

Intersection upgrades

It is expected that some upgrade of Barigan Road would be required to facilitate safe transport requirements. Intersection upgrades are not anticipated to be required for this proposal. Road upgrade requirements are discussed in detail in Section 8.6.

Section 8.6.3 (Table 8-34) states the following:

The following upgrade would be completed in consultation with Mid-Western Regional Council.

- *Passing facilities will be implemented at strategic locations between Wollar village and the Northern Access.*

Based on the description in the EIS, it appears that WSD proposes to develop new passing facilities on Barrigan Road, which may involve land disturbance and potentially the clearing of remnant native vegetation within the road reserve.

WCPL's experience indicates that remnant vegetation in road reserves in the local area can include threatened ecological communities (i.e. remnants of previous communities that were widespread prior to agricultural development).

WSD may not be the proponent for the road upgrades because there is an agreement between the Mid-Western Regional Council and WSD for Council to be the proponent for these works. However, if WSD is to be the proponent for the works, it is not clear that the works are included in the EIS specialist assessments, as the proposal area provided on Figure 1-2 of the EIS does not include them (reproduced below).

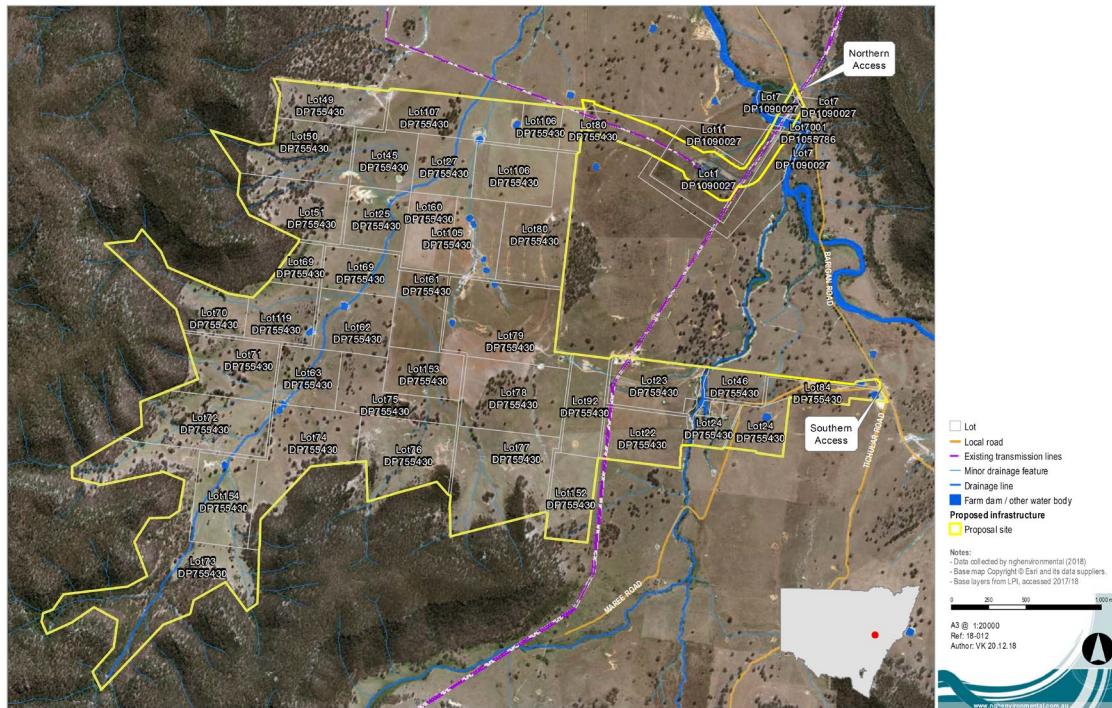


Figure 1-2 Lot and DPs of the proposal site.

WCPL therefore suggests that the Department seeks confirmation from Mid-Western Regional Council as to the proponent of the proposed Wollar Solar Farm local road upgrades.

WCPL also notes that Roads and Maritime Services (2019) in its submission raised concerns regarding the safety of the Barrigan Road and Wollar Road intersection and its capacity to accommodate Wollar Solar Farm construction turning movements. If upgrades of this intersection are also required in support of the Wollar Solar Farm, it is suggested that the Department should also clarify the proponent and assessment process for the intersection upgrade works.

Bushfire Risk

WCPL notes that Fire & Rescue NSW (2019) has requested that a comprehensive fire safety study be undertaken and an emergency response plan be developed for the Wollar Solar Farm to reflect emerging hazards and risks with battery storage facilities.

Any increase in bushfire risk is of real concern to WCPL with respect to its mining operations and associated rural landholdings, and to the local community. It is suggested that the Wollar Solar Farm should be required to contribute appropriately to the local RFS or implement other appropriate mitigation measures, if the proposal raises local bushfire risk.

Project Scale

WCPL also notes that the Mid-Western Regional Council (2019) in its submission has raised a concern that the scale of the Wollar Solar Farm project may have been understated in the assessments presented in the EIS (i.e. 922,432 panels assessed versus up to 1,392,000 panels planned to be installed).

WCPL suggests that the scale of the project should be limited by the metrics assessed in the EIS, unless further assessment and consultation is undertaken.

Summary

WCPL does not object to the proposed Wollar Solar Farm.

WCPL does, however, have concerns that some elements of the proposal have not been clearly articulated or comprehensively assessed to date, and that the Wollar Solar Farm may pose a constraint or risk to current or future WCPL open cut mining operations.

It is suggested that these concerns be comprehensively addressed by WSD and the Department before Peabody Pastoral Holdings Pty Ltd then considers WSD's request that Peabody Pastoral Holdings Pty Ltd provide landholder consent for the Wollar Solar Farm application.

Should the Wollar Solar Farm be approved, WCPL also requests that it be on the condition that the Wollar Solar Farm contributes proportionally to any local road maintenance requirements arising from its construction traffic.

Yours sincerely,

Wilpinjong Coal Pty Ltd



Blair Jackson

General Manager

Wilpinjong Coal Pty Ltd