



Department of Primary Industries

OUT20/13856

10 November 2020

Mr Javier Canon
Planning and Assessment Group
NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Major Project Portal

Dear Javier

Tilbuster Solar Farm – Assessment (SSD 6919) (Armidale Regional Council)

I refer to your request for advice on 16 October 2020 to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) regarding review of the above proposal.

There are a number of areas where the development proposal can be strengthened in relation to its impact on agriculture. The main recommendations contained in the attachment relate to:

- The requirements for pre-existing soil and land conditions to inform construction activities, monitoring during the operational phase and how this data will inform the final closure.
- Groundcover and weed management.
- Consultation with adjacent landholders in relation to groundcover management, access and the developments construction and operation.
- Final closure arrangements including restoration outcomes.

Please contact myself if you have further queries please on mobile 0427949987.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mary Kovac'.

Mary Kovac
Agricultural Land Use Planning Officer
Central West and Western
Agricultural Landuse Planning Unit

DPI Agriculture Recommendations – Tilbuster Solar Farm (SSD 9619)

Baseline soil and land assessment

The EIS notes the commitment to a baseline soil survey prior to consultation to inform the CEMP and sub plans, rehabilitation and operational aspects of soil and groundcover management. It is important that the pre- development land and soil capabilities that can be measured can at least be attained at the current level or better with the closure and rehabilitation of the solar farm.

The benefits of ‘resting land’ are discussed in the EIS. To achieve these claims groundcover types, quantities and management, soil chemical and moisture testing, including organic matter are all parameters that can be measured to substantiate the major outcomes of the solar farm’s land resting phase. These should be reported on from annually to every three years (depending on the parameters) (page 254-5).

Groundcover and weed management

The Groundcover Management Plan development in consultation with an agronomist to ensure perennial pasture is maintained across the site, is noted. Weed control will form part of this planning.

A pest and weed management plan will also be developed with Armidale Regional Council and NSW DPI. This should also involve the New England Weeds Authority who deal with noxious and other priority weed species in the area. This should also be considered in relation to the Groundcover Management Plan where a weed management procedure can be developed to prevent and minimise the spread of weeds that are noxious, priority, environmental etc.

Consulting with adjacent landholders

Consultation will take place with adjacent landholders re groundcover activities and access. This should be extended to the overall construction and future operating environment of the solar farm.

Decommissioning and closure

With decommissioning all underground infrastructure should be removed to 500mm below the surface, not just cabling. (Page 247).

A closure strategy should also be included especially if a return to agricultural use is anticipated. This is where the baseline soil assessment and soil health monitoring program will assist in returning land to a similar or improved land capability.