Department of Primary Industries
and Regional Development

OUT26/1768

Ms Rita Hatem
c/- Major Projects Portal

rita.hatem@planning.nsw.gov.au

DPIRD advice on EIS for Forbes Solar Farm, Forbes LGA (SSD-72383210)

Dear Rita,

I refer to your request of 20 January 2026 for advice on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Forbes Solar Farm, 207 Hooper Road, Forbes.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Agriculture and Biosecurity (the Department) collaborates with our stakeholders to protect and enhance the productive and sustainable use and resilience of agricultural resources and the environment.

The Department's advice is guided by s.4.15 (1) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act), and in the context of large-scale renewable energy projects, the Objects of the EP&A Act in s.1.3(a) and (i).

The EIS considers the project's 30-40 year removal of approximately 270 ha of productive agricultural land as temporary, resulting in a 'negligible net loss' of regional agricultural productivity from the 232ha project footprint. Agricultural losses are estimated to be in the range of approximately $2.7 million over the life of the project (~ 30 years) and an additional reduction in agricultural goods and services expenditure of $2.36 million, with Parkes and Forbes most likely affected. However, agrisolar could reduce these figures by approximately $440-470,000, respectively.

The project site has regionally mapped Land and Soil Capability Classes 3 and 4 land and is also identified as 36% draft mapped State Significant Agricultural Land. The site is part of the productive agricultural landscape that contributed $3.56 billion gross value of agricultural production in 2020-21, with Forbes LGA contributing $285.42m[1].

Appendix E.4 contains a Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment (LUCRA), which identifies the potential impacts of the project on adjoining landholders and the landscape. Both the LUCRA and Appendix E.4 address and provide mitigation measures for the likely disturbances to agricultural resources typical for such projects. As noted, the implementation of agrisolar (sheep grazing) is proposed as

[1] AgTrack - Agricultural and Land Use Dashboard (nsw.gov.au)

an option to reduce the impacts of lost agricultural productivity during the operational phase; however will require significant infrastructure investment and site preparation.

Appendix E.4 contains appropriate measures suggested for each phase of the project to manage biosecurity risk, soils, ground cover and decommissioning such that the site can be returned to agricultural productivity post development. Further suggestions are provided below to guide the final EIS post-submissions:

Agrisolar

If agrisolar is pursued, a Grazing Management Plan should be prepared, including (but not limited to):

- Sheep handling infrastructure such as fencing and laneways under the solar array, watering points, sheep yards, loading ramp, shearing shed, refuges, arrangements for emergencies, etc
- Pasture management – the establishment and maintenance of appropriate pasture given the likelihood of weed invasion following cropping and expected soil disturbance for the construction and operational stages. Retention of at least 70% of ground cover is recommended.

Groundcover

- In the event agriculture or agrisolar is not undertaken, ground cover should be maintained at a minimum of 70% to prevent soil erosion, as noted in the EIS.
- Details on the measures and management practices to re-establish vegetation on the land during the operation of the project should be provided, noting the risks of soil erosion and, alternatively, fire.

Biosecurity

Appendix E.4 details the risks of biosecurity breach on the site and surrounding land due to the project, which is supported. It is suggested that the proposed mitigations and actions be described in a standalone Biosecurity Risk Management Plan for each project phase. The Biosecurity Risk Management in Land Use Planning and Development Guide is provided for consideration.

Decommissioning

The EIS describes a commitment to the removal of above and below-ground infrastructure to a depth of 1000mm, which is supported. Rehabilitation arrangements should include groundcover management using endemic native species to limit dust during remediation.

Should you require clarification on any of the information contained in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0487 023 845 or by email at landuse.ag@dpird.nsw.gov.au.

Sincerely

Nita Scott
Agricultural Land Use Planning
Central West Orana Region

17 February 2026