

BM:LD:AA | SSD-29508870

9 November 2022

Attention: Javier Canon  
NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment  
4 Parramatta Square, 12 Darcy St  
PARRAMATTA NSW 2150

Dear Javier,

**SUBJECT: BIRRIWA SOLAR FARM (SSD-29508870)**

Thank you for providing Mid-Western Regional Council (Council) with the opportunity to provide comment on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Birriwa Solar Farm (SSD-29508870). Council has reviewed the document and provides the following comments.

**WORKFORCE/ACCOMMODATION**

The EIS notes there will be an estimated 800 workers during the peak construction period, which is expected to run for a period of approximately 28 months. The EIS has proposed that accommodation be sourced from surrounding towns such as Mudgee and Gulgong during this period.

Council are strongly concerned with this aspect of the project as there is currently a severe shortage of appropriate accommodation in both these towns for tourism, made worse by the competing demands placed upon accommodation availability by State Significant Developments (SSD) and other major project construction workforces for developments approved by Council.

This shortage/competition will be particularly evident during the construction phase which coincides with the peak construction periods of several other SSD projects in the region that are either approved or in the assessment/consultation phase, with more projects being planned every day aiming to meet the objectives of the Renewable Energy Zone, including:

- Wollar Solar (400 workers)
- Stubbo Solar Farm (400 workers)
- Burrendong Wind Farm (450 workers)
- Tallawang Solar Farm (430 workers)
- Barney's Reef Wind Farm (340 workers)
- Bellambi Heights Solar (400 workers)
- Bowdens Silver (320 workers)



- Local Coal Mine expansions (250 workers)
- Valley of the Winds Farm (400 workers)
- Central-West Orana REZ Transmission Project (workers 650)

In total, the projects above require 4,040 workers with the majority needing to be housed in the Mid-Western Region LGA and does not account for the workforces of additional significant projects such mine expansions, the Inland Rail and other significant local construction projects approved by Council. Considering, Council strongly objects to the utilisation of accommodation within the Mid-Western Region.

## **AGRICULTURE**

The EIS indicates that the subject site is classified Class 5 under the land and soil capability assessment scheme. It is important to note that as the Mid-Western Region has no Class 1 land and only a small amount of Class 2 land, classes 3-5 have greater agricultural value within the Region compared to other regions.

As requested in Council's response to SEARs, an economic analysis should be provided to demonstrate the impact of removing 1,250ha of valuable agricultural land from the local economy, as this has not been included within the EIS.

An Agricultural Impact Assessment is also requested. This should include soil testing to determine the specific highest agricultural capability of the subject site and identify the processes, inputs and costs associated with returning the subject site to a condition capable of sustaining agriculture when the site is no longer used for renewable energy.

## **WASTE**

The EIS notes that the Gulgong and Mudgee Waste Facility as well as the Birriwa Rural Waste Transfer Station are potentially available facilities for the disposal or management of wastes. In this regard, Council wishes to advise that none of the referenced facilities are appropriate or capable to handle the disposal of wastes generated by the project. Gulgong and Birriwa Waste Facilities are not landfill facilities, accepting mainly general residential type wastes such as household garbage, paper and cardboard. All material deposited at these facilities are transported to Mudgee's Waste Facility. The Mudgee Waste Facility has no capacity to take large quantities of material likely to be generated by the project as the capacity of the existing Waste Cell is almost exhausted. Further, Council requests consideration be given to the domestic waste produced by 800 construction workers.

## **DECOMMISSIONING AND REHABILITATION**

Council recognises that a decommissioning and site restoration plan will be provided. However, Council requests that such a plan be prepared and conditioned to include the following, at a minimum:

- The anticipated present value cost of decommissioning works, along with an explanation of the calculation of that cost (including a buffer for changes in market values/ inflation).
- The physical plan for decommissioning, prepared or certified by an engineer, confirming that full remediation/ restoration of the site to its former primary production use/ class land capability is possible.
- Commitment to a financial security to cover the cost of decommissioning.
- Management and waste reduction initiatives as to where generated waste will be disposed and/or recycled, without impacting on local waste facilities and in accordance with:
  - Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997



- Protection of the Environment Operations (Waste) Regulation 2014
- Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2001
- NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Waste Classification Guidelines

Ideally, the above information should be updated every 5 - 7 years to keep up with changes.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL**

Council will be happy to assist with identifying suitable native plant species and local tube stock providers for the 2.15km of screen planting required around the solar farm. However, Council would expect a Vegetation Management Plan be provided to ensure it is consistent with the surrounding PCTs, furthered by the provision of a long term high threat weed management program.

Of particular importance here is the finding of Koala scats by dog detection during targeted surveys where previous koala records and mapping does not exist. It should be emphasised that MWR Council have just engaged an ecological consultant to undertake Koala Mapping within our LGA as part of the National Recovery Plan for the Koala. The plan following this detailed mapping involves a targeted Koala Conservation Plan for the entire Mid Western LGA. Any further minimisation to the loss of existing Koala habitat would be highly regarded and encouraged by Council, particularly in the high value PCTs 80 and 281 where the Koala scats were recorded. Although it is was only recommended and not adopted following the last statutory review of the EPBC Act in 2021, all possible avoidance and mitigation measures should be taken first before biodiversity offsets are available.

If the high quality vegetation where the koala scats were found can be retained, this would show a proactive approach by both the developer and Council in contributing towards a national goal of saving the listed koala from extinction. With combined efforts at this critical time nationwide, it could have an overall positive impact on the future habitat and survival of the endangered Koala by “no longer removing known koala habitat in exchange for biodiversity credits”. This approach is becoming embedded in the national rhetoric following the listing of the koala from vulnerable to endangered earlier this year and following the decimation of many populations during the bushfires of 2018/19 and 2019/20.

At a minimum, further Koala studies in this area should be conducted by a suitably qualified ecologist, undertaking methods such as tracking, monitoring and sound recording to determine the range of the local Koalas and what they are using the area for ie: breeding/feeding, before development is able to commence. This would better predict the likely effect removing vegetation would have on the resident koalas and guide a conservation plan for this particular population.

## **ENGINEERING**

Barneys Reef is deemed to be a suitable access road subject to the following;

- Road widening is conducted where required with minimal impact on trees
- Small piped culverts are installed where required
- The mitre drains are deepened
- The road pavement receives additional gravelling for the traffic loadings and sealing
- The pavement thickness is determined by a geotechnical assessment
- The intersection of Barney Reef Road and Castlereagh Highway is referred to Transport NSW for consideration and conditioning

Further, the pavement on the Birriwa Bus Route is to be of the same standard as Barneys Reef Road and the existing concrete culvert is to be assessed for structural adequacy.

### **SEWERAGE DISPOSAL**

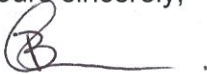
It is noted that sewage is proposed to be pumped out and disposed of at a Mid-Western Regional Council facility. Council does not have capacity for additional sewage to the anticipated volumes of this project and other SSD projects planned. Therefore, Council advises that sewage cannot be pumped out and disposed at any Mid-Western Regional Council facility unless significant funding is provided to upgrade these facilities to increase capacity.

### **WATER SUPPLY**

Council request a quality assurance program (QAP) for the treatment and provision of water to workers is provided. Further, it is not noted how the project intends to source water during both the construction phase and for matters such as landscaping. If the proponent wishes to draw from Councils water supply for any purpose it should be noted that Council does not have capacity to support this and will not be able to provide water unless significant upgrades are undertaken at Council facilities which would need to be funded by the proponent.

Should you have any further enquiries in relation to this matter, please contact Council on (02) 6378 2850.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'BRAD CAM', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

BRAD CAM

GENERAL MANAGER