



Social Impact Scoping Report

Narragamba Solar Project, NSW

2 July 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

ACEN Australia Pty Ltd (ACEN Australia) is proposing to construct and operate the Narragamba Solar Project (the Project), within the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO-REZ) in New South Wales (NSW). The proposed solar project would be located in the Mid-Western Regional local government areas, in the suburb of Merotherie, 4km west of Bungaba and 17km north of Gulgong. There are two privately owned properties within the development footprint.

This Social Impact Scoping Report has been prepared by AAP Consulting Pty Ltd on behalf of ACEN Australia, the proponent of the project. It documents the process and outcomes of the scoping phase of the social impact assessment and has been prepared in consideration of the DPE Social Impact Assessment Guideline (2021) (2021 Guideline).

1.2 Project description

The project would include the construction, operation and decommissioning of an approximately 320-megawatt (AC) solar project to power approximately 160,400 homes. The project would supply electricity to the NEM via a dedicated 330kV transmission line connecting to the Merotherie energy hub proposed by EnergyCo on behalf of the Network Operator.

The project is located immediately north of the approved Stubbo Solar Project however would be constructed and operated as separate projects.

The project is expected to require up to 400 full-time employees during peak construction and up to 10 full-time employees would be required during operation and ongoing maintenance of the solar project.

The solar project site would be accessed from Merotherie Road via the Golden Highway. Access would likely be from the northwest corner of the study area, however the exact location would be confirmed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Some public road upgrades would likely be required to facilitate construction traffic. These would be confirmed during the EIS, but it is expected that these would include a portion of Merotherie Road. Any road upgrades required for the project would be considered in conjunction with any proposed by EnergyCo as part of the CWO-REZ Infrastructure and other proposed generation projects in the local area.

The operational lifespan of the project is indicatively 25 years, with potential for major upgrades, including repowering. At the end of its operational life, the project would be decommissioned and land that is impacted by the project would be appropriately rehabilitated in consultation with the affected landholders.

Ongoing refinement of the proposed layout and technology would continue throughout the EIS process in response to engineering design refinements, landholder negotiations, and outcomes of environmental and social assessments to minimise potential impacts where possible.

A complete description of the Project is provided in Chapter 4 of the Scoping Report (Ramboll, 2023).

1.3 The applicant

The proponent of the project is ACEN Australia Pty Ltd (ACEN Australia). ACEN is the Philippine listed energy platform of the Ayala Corporation. The company has approximately 3,800 megawatts of attributable capacity in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and Australia. The company’s renewable share of capacity is at 87 percent, among the highest in the region. ACEN’s aspiration is to be the largest listed renewables platform in Southeast Asia, with a goal of reaching 5,000 megawatts of renewables capacity by 2025.

ACEN has been a partner of UPC Renewables in Australia since 2018. In 2021, ACEN began a transaction to eventually own 100 percent of UPC\AC Renewables by early 2023. With this transaction, the company is now called ACEN Australia.

ACEN Australia has numerous renewable energy assets in Australia under development and construction, including several solar, wind, battery, pumped hydro and energy storage projects across NSW, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia, including:

- New England Solar in NSW (under construction)
- Stubbo Solar in NSW (under construction)
- Birriwa Solar in NSW
- Valley of the Winds in NSW
- Aquila Wind in NSW
- Phoenix Pumped Hydro in NSW
- Axedale Solar in Victoria
- Robbins Island and Jim's Plain Wind in Tasmania
- North East Wind in Tasmania.

1.4 Structure of this report

The structure of this report is influenced by the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) Guideline requirements and is outlined below.

Table 1.1 Structure of this report

Chapter	Description
Chapter 1	Introduces the project and structure of this report
Chapter 2	Describes the methodology during the scoping phase
Chapter 3	Describes the social locality
Chapter 4	Establishes the social baseline
Chapter 5	Provides an overview of engagement during the scoping phase
Chapter 6	Initial identification of the likely social impacts for different groups in the social locality
Chapter 7	Provides a framework for approach to SIA in the assessment phase

2 Methodology

This Social Impact Assessment Scoping Report (SIA Scoping Report) has been prepared in accordance with the SIA Guideline as part of the environmental impact assessment process and will inform the likely size and scale of the SIA.

In carrying out the SIA Scoping Report and initial assessment, the following has been considered:

- initial understanding of the project's social locality
- the characteristic of the communities within the social locality (the social baseline)
- preliminary identification of social impacts for different groups in the social locality and the level to which these impacts need to be assessed in the SIA
- any potential refinements or approaches in response to likely social impacts
- the SIA research methods that will be used to inform the SIA, including engagement.

2.1 Understanding of project context

A review of regional planning policies and strategies was conducted to contextualise the project (see Chapter 4). Outcomes of community engagement completed by ACEN Australia relating to the project, as well as various comparative studies of nearby projects has also informed this project context.

2.2 Scoping of likely social impacts

The scoping of likely social impacts resulting from the Project has been guided by the SIA Guideline and with reference to the social impact categories presented in Table 2.1 below. The scoping of likely social impacts was informed by:

- understanding the project context and activities
- reviewing the outcomes of engagement activities conducted by ACEN Australia to date
- reviewing the existing environment and outcomes of preliminary assessments completed as part of the Scoping Report for the project
- considering community opinions and sentiment towards the project activities through
 - desktop research and review of other comparative projects
 - social commentary of comparative projects and issues in the social locality
 - review of submissions and research from comparative projects including the Stubbo Solar Project.

Table 2.1 Social impact categories (SIA Guideline)

Categories	Definition
Way of life	How people live, how they get around, how they work, how they play, and how they interact each day.
Community	Community composition, cohesion, character, how the community functions, and people’s sense of place.
Accessibility	How people access and use infrastructure, services and facilities, whether provided by a public, private or not-for-profit organisation.
Culture	Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, including shared beliefs, customs, values and stories, and connections to Country, land, waterways, places and buildings.
Health and wellbeing	Physical and mental health especially for people vulnerable to social exclusion or substantial change, psychological stress resulting from financial or other pressures, access to open space and effects on public health.
Surroundings	Ecosystem services such as shade, pollution control, and erosion control, public safety and security, access to and use of the natural and built environment, and aesthetic value and amenity.
Livelihoods	People’s capacity to sustain themselves through employment or business.
Decision-making systems	Including the extent to which people can have a say in decisions that affect their lives, and have access to complaint, remedy and grievance mechanisms.

2.3 Determining the social locality and description of existing environment

The approach used to determine the SIA social locality considered who is most likely to experience direct and indirect impacts because of the project and where those groups of people are located.

The social locality is informed by the scoping of social impacts and will be further refined and updated accordingly to project changes and further investigation of impacts during the assessment phase.

The description of the existing environment provides a summary of the social locality, including a high-level overview of regional demographic characteristics, socio-economic backgrounds, land use, key industries, social infrastructure, and an overview of directly impacted state suburbs and localities.

2.4 Determining the complexity of Phase 2 SIA report

The approach used to determine the level of assessment required for an identified social impact has been completed in accordance with the SIA Guideline following the completion of the SIA Scoping Tool. A key objective of the SIA scoping phase is to identify the level of assessment required for each impact in the assessment phase. The level of assessment determines the extent of effort and data required to assess the impact. The levels of assessment and the indicative data requirements are shown in Table 2.2 and have been sources from the SIA Guideline.

Table 2.2 Level of assessment (DPE, 2021)

Level of Assessment	Secondary Data	Primary Data	
		Engagement	Research
Detailed: the project may result in significant social impacts, including cumulative impacts.	Required	Broad engagement	Targeted research
Standard: the project is unlikely to result in significant social impacts, including cumulative impacts.	Required	Targeted engagement	Potentially targeted research
Minor: the project may result in minor social impacts.	Required	Limited – if required (e.g. local council)	Not required
Not relevant: The project will have no social impact, or the social impacts of the project will be negligible.	N/A		

The scoped social impacts and their required level of assessment are outlined in **Chapter 5**.

3 Social locality

3.1 Preliminary identification of social locality

This report considers social impacts in the 'social locality'. There is no prescribed meaning or fixed, predefined geographic boundary to a project's social locality; rather, the social locality has been construed based on the project's nature and its impacts. A number of factors have been considered in determining the social locality for the project, including:

- the nature and scale of the project and its associated activities
- the characteristics of surrounding communities and how positive and negative impacts may be reasonably perceived or experienced by different people, including those that may be vulnerable or marginalised
- the potentially affected built or natural features located near the project that have social value or importance
- cumulative impacts that may impact affected communities because of other projects or operations near the project site
- any relevant social, cultural, demographic trends or social change processes occurring now or in the past near the project site
- the history of the proposed project site and the area, and any similar experiences people near the project have had
- the broader (indirect) area of social influence of communities that will be impacted by future incoming workforces, business opportunities, construction access and supply chain routes.

A social baseline profile has been developed of the Project's social locality as shown in Figure 3.1, which is inclusive of:

- property owners and residents of associated dwellings and properties to be used for study area including any ancillary facilities
- property owners and residents surrounding the proposed study area, including those most directly affected suburbs and localities (SAL) as per the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) statistical areas of Merotherie, Bungaba, Cope, Stubbo and Tallawang
- the nearest town of Gulgong (17km south) and Dunedoo (25km northwest) and the host local government area (LGA) of the Mid-Western Regional Council (MWRC)
- transportation routes along the Golden Highway and the proposed access to the site via Merotherie Road (heavy and light vehicles).

The social locality may extend beyond these boundaries as the Project considered cumulative impacts, places of residence of future construction and operational workforce and the use of services and social infrastructure for example, along with where materials may be sourced for the Project. The social locality will be further refined as required during the assessment phase.

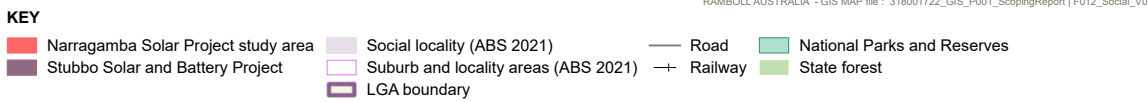
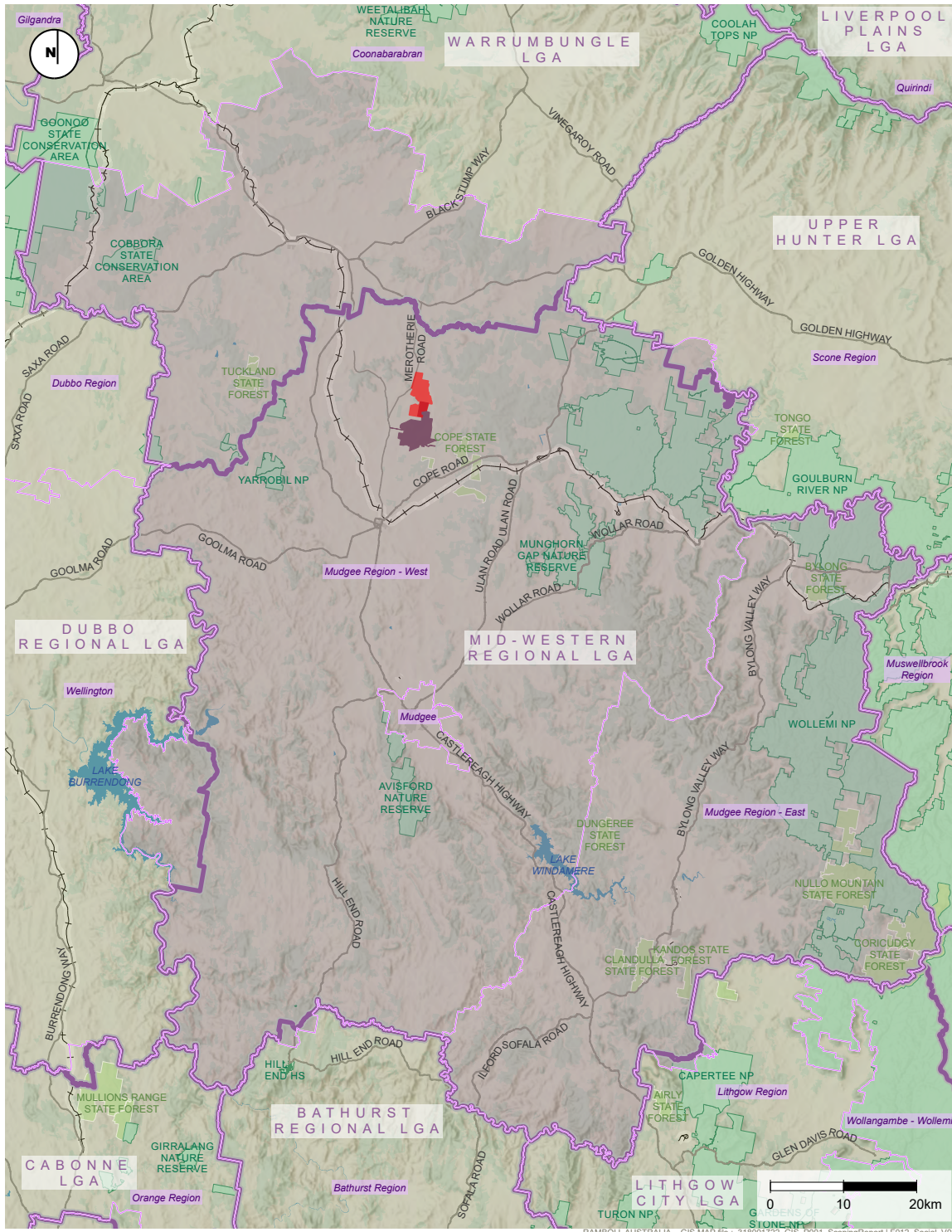


Figure 7-13 | Social - Social locality

Figure 3.1 Social locality

4 Preliminary social baseline

This chapter presents the social baseline for the Project and describes the social context without the Project. It documents the existing social environment, conditions and trends relevant to the Project and defines characteristics of the communities within the Project's social locality, including any vulnerable groups.

The social baseline considers any built or natural features on or near the Project that could be affected and the intangible values that people may associate with these features. Examples may include a sense of place or belonging and the relevant social, cultural, and demographic trends or social change processes occurring now or in the past, near the Project and in the broader region.

The social baseline also provides a point of comparison – it can be used as a reference against which to measure the project's impacts as it develops and/or to determine the adequacy or otherwise of existing facilities (Vanclay et al., 2015).

A summary of the social baseline is provided in the body of this report as an overview of the existing environment.

4.1 Development context

4.1.1 National and International Context

The year 2022 and 2023 saw electricity prices in NSW and Australia significantly rise. In May 2022, the NSW short-term wholesale price of electricity was reportedly 80% higher than in 2021, while national wholesale energy prices increased 140% in 12 months. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) released its draft determination offer of the Default Market Offer for 2023 to 2024 which estimates a 19.5 percent to 23.7 percent cost increase for residential customers depending on their region and whether they have controlled load (Australian Energy Regulator, 2023).

In June 2022, for the first time since its establishment, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) suspended wholesale spot market trading on the East Coast of Australia to ensure a reliable supply. Price caps, implemented by AEMO to limit rising electricity costs, resulted in unprofitable conditions for electricity generators. Consequently, electricity generators withdrew from the energy market, reducing supply during notably high demand. This high-demand and energy production cost nexus has highlighted vulnerabilities within the East Coast energy market.

The instability and restriction of global supply chains have increased market prices for fossil fuels, notably in Australia. As a result, renewable energy and energy storage have been identified as appropriate measures to reduce energy prices and the State and National vulnerabilities to global instability.

The cost of living has also continued to increase, with electricity being one of many rising household costs (alongside petrol, interest rates, housing, HECS debt indexation and food). Of particular note, on the 8th of March 2023, the RBA increased the official cash rate by 0.25% to 3.60%. This was the tenth increase to the cash rate since May 2022 (ASX, 2023) and is the most aggressive rate rise since 1994. While the cash rate remained stable in April 2023, when compared with limited wage growth across the State, the cost of living is rising faster than wages, increasing pressure on households.

4.1.2 Renewable Energy in NSW

New South Wales is currently undergoing an energy sector transformation. The NEM (managed by the AEMO) is transitioning from a system dominated by a small number of large coal-fired generators to one of diverse and distributed renewable energy generation and storage.

The Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap is the NSW Government's plan to transform the electricity system into one that is cheap, clean and reliable. The roadmap emphasises the need for NSW to transition to renewable energy and aims to replace NSW's ageing coal-fired power stations with a coordinated portfolio of energy generation, storage and network investments. The roadmap is expected to help reduce NSW electricity emissions by 90 million tonnes by 2030 and to support NSW in delivering on its net zero ambitions by 2050 (NSW Energy, 2020).

The Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030 is the foundation for NSW's action on climate change and goal to reach net zero emissions by 2050 (DPIE, 2020). It outlines the NSW Government's plan to grow the economy, create jobs and reduce emissions over the next decade. The NSW Government supports the development of a sustainable solar energy industry and states that 'solar energy will help reduce reliance on fossil fuels, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and deliver a reliable and affordable energy supply to the people of NSW'.

Overall, the reliability of the NSW electricity supply is highly strained, while consumer electricity and general living costs are rising, increasing pressure on businesses and households. It is projected by the Applicant that the Project will contribute to meeting Australia's commitments through the generation of renewable energy and the resultant annual reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

4.2 Regional context

The project is in the Central West-Orana Region in New South Wales, adjacent to Merotherie Road. The main local roads within the locality include Barneys Reef Road, Blue Springs Road and Birkalla Road. The key regional cities and major towns include Dubbo, Mudgee, Orange and Bathurst.

The Central West-Orana Region is home to more than 325,000 people who live in a diverse network of centres and rural localities. The regional cities of Bathurst and Orange in the east have relatively contained local catchments and connections to both Sydney and Canberra. In the north of the region Dubbo and Mudgee also have connections to the communities in the Hunter Valley, with Dubbo also being a major service centre for much of Western NSW (Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041).

Key land uses in the local and broader region include agriculture (consisting primarily of sheep and cattle grazing) and dry land cropping, with areas of mining, viticulture and production forestry located within the broader region (ABS, 2021). Renewable energy development is a growing land use in the area, with multiple renewable energy projects located in the vicinity and many more proposed due to the declaration of the Central-West Orana REZ.

The region has a diverse economic base underpinned by mining and agriculture. The mining sector is intensifying as new gold, silver and copper deposits are identified, as well as rare earth deposits in Dubbo and Condobolin.

According to the Department of Regional NSW, the proportion of people aged above 65 years will increase from 19 per cent, as of 2016, to 25 per cent in 2036. More people, especially from the Aboriginal community, will be living with chronic illness. Relating this to the provision of social infrastructure and services, there has been controversy in recent years relating to the under supply of health care in the region with some townships, such as Gulgong, relying on tele-health services for periods of time. The transient workers for mining and agribusiness and potential strains on community services is relevant when considering growth in other sectors such as renewable energy.

Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041

The NSW Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment (now DPE)'s Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041 is a 20-year blueprint for the future of the Central West and Orana region and the overarching strategic planning framework.

The vision outlined in the plan is to create a healthy, connected and resilient region, with a prosperous economy and highlights the region's role in supporting the State's transition to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 through a broad range of actions, including through enabling the establishment of the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. The elements of the Regional Plan that are addressed by the project are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Relationship of the project to Central West and Orana Regional Plan

Plan Reference	Regional Plan element	Relevance of the project to element
Objective 2: Support the State's transition to Net Zero by 2050 and deliver the CWO-REZ	Increase renewable energy generation. Collaborate with numerous stakeholders to develop the CWO-REZ and identify economic diversification and land use planning issues, opportunities and actions to respond to changes in energy generation, transmission, storage and use required to meet the NSW target of Net Zero by 2050.	The project has the potential to directly contribute to the achievement of this objective.
Objective 9: Ensure site selection and design embraces and respects the region's landscapes, character and cultural heritage.	Visual landscapes and settings can be impacted through infrastructure development such as renewable energy projects. Scenic and cultural landscapes should be protected for their aesthetic, social and economic values for the character and identify of the region. Land use and infrastructure planning must respond to the region's landscape.	The project has the potential to directly contribute to this objective.
Objective 16: Provide accommodation options for seasonal, temporary and key workers	Over the next 5 years, the region has more than \$12.6 billion of planned investment in major capital projects, including works in the CWO-REZ. Ensuring adequate accommodation is available for residents, workers and the tourism industry is a priority for Councils.	The project will have a sizeable construction workforce that will contribute to the availability of accommodation.

4.3 Local context

4.3.1 Governance

The Project is within the Mid-Western Regional LGA which is governed by the Mid-Western Regional Council (MWRC)

Mid-Western Regional LGA

The Mid-Western Regional LGA includes the larger township of Mudgee, and smaller townships and villages of Gulgong, Rylstone, Kandos, Bylong and Ulan.

The social demographic of the Mid-Western Regional LGA can be described as predominantly rural with a mix of urban areas. It is home to 25,713, with 3,395 more people calling Mid-Western Regional home in 2021 compared to 2011 (ABS, 2021). The median age of residents is 42 years, which is notably higher than the state average of 36 years. The gender split is almost even with 50.3% females and 49.7% males.

The area has an ageing population which is evidenced by the 2021 ABS Census outcomes. In 2021 the 70-79 years cohort in the LGA recorded the largest population change, showing a 18.1% increase from 2016. The 50-59 years cohort is the most common with 3,551 people.

The region is home to the Wiradjuri people – the largest Aboriginal group in central New South Wales, by area and population. The people of the Wiradjuri country are known as “people of three rivers” being the Macquarie River (Wambool), Lachlan River (Kalari) and the Murrumbidgee River (Murrumbidjeri) which border their lands. Aboriginal people account for approximately 6.8% of the Mid-Western Regional LGA (ABS, 2021).

In terms of ethnicity, the population is predominantly of Australian or British descent, with smaller populations of people from other countries. The majority of residents speak English at home.

Key land uses in the local and broader region include agriculture (consisting primarily of sheep and cattle grazing) and dry land cropping, with areas of mining, viticulture and production forestry located within the broader region. Renewable energy development is a growing land use in the area, with multiple renewable energy projects located in the vicinity. This is reflective of the labour force, with dominant industries of employment including coal mining (18.1%), agriculture, forestry and fishing and construction (8.2%) (Remplan, 2022).

Around 57% of the population make about the labour force and analysis of the employment status (as a percentage of the labour force) in the region compared to NSW shows that unemployment levels are relatively low. In the June 2022 quarter, unemployment in the Mid-Western Region LGA was 2.5% (Remplan). The median weekly household income for residents is \$1,486 which is significantly lower than the state average of \$1,829.

The Mid-Western Regional Council considers one of its distinct competitive advantages to be its central location to Sydney and Newcastle, and strong transport links (Mid-Western Regional Council, 2022). Daily air and coach services access the region and is a 45-minute flight or 3.5 hour drive north-west from Sydney. The Castlereagh Highway traverses the region and is a main route of travel for inland residents, connecting Lithgow in the south to south-east Queensland in the north. The Castlereagh Highway meets the Golden Highway near Dunedoo which is a key route of travel from

Dubbo to Newcastle, giving the region access to the Hunter region and the major metropolitan centre of Newcastle, including the Port of Newcastle.

In terms of vulnerability, this assessment has reviewed the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This is a suite of indexes that have been created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from social and economic Census information. Specifically, this assessment looks at the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), a general socio-economic index that summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. The SEIFA score for Mid-Western Regional Council in 2016 was 960. Across Australia's local government areas SEIFA scores range from 188 (most disadvantaged) to 1186 (least disadvantaged). This score is reflective of several indicators, including the lower incomes when compared to the NSW average, lower level of educational attainment, age of population and health statistics, as socio-economic status is a significant determinant of physical and mental health (Wang & Geng 2019).

Overall, the Mid-Western Regional Council is a diverse community with a mix of rural and urban areas, and a range of employment opportunities and income levels.

Towards 2040 Mid-Western Region Community Plan

Mid-Western Regional Council's Towards 2040 Mid-Western Region Community Plan identifies priorities and aspirations to be implemented over the next 20-years. The plan is based on broad community engagement across the LGA and establishes objectives and strategies to achieve those main priorities.

The five key themes addressed in the community plan are community, environment, economy, connectivity, and governance. Under the theme of community, the plan identifies the 'effective and efficient delivery of infrastructure' as a key goal to service local and regional needs.

4.3.2 Settlement patterns close to the solar farm site

There are approximately 68 dwellings located within 5 km of the solar farm site. There are approximately 35 dwellings within a 4 km radius, of which two are associated with the project (under landholder agreement). Land use on these properties is largely characterised by sheep grazing and sheep grazing would continue within the Project site during operations.

The Project is proposed to be based in the suburb of Merotherie, a small agricultural locality with a population of 24. Gulgong is the nearest larger township to the Project located approximately 17 km to the south, with the population centre of Dunedoo approximately 25 km northwest. The site is in proximity to the Castlereagh Highway and the Golden Highway giving the local area access to the Hunter region, the major metropolitan centre of Newcastle as well as inland links to south-east Queensland.

Gulgong is a former gold mining town, with a population almost double the size of Dunedoo, with 2,680 calling Gulgong home. Today Gulgong's primary industry is coal mining, however the area also attracts notable tourist attention due to its rich settler history and reputation as the childhood home of the well-known Australian poet and writer Henry Lawson. The town holds a number of annual historical festivals and celebrations, including the Henry Lawson Heritage Festival in June, the Gulgong Folk festival in December, and the Gulgong Gold and Mining Festival in October.

The Dunedoo community has a population of 1,097 and primary industries are agriculture, with significant mixed farming and cattle and sheep industries. The township is located at the junction of the Golden and Castlereagh Highways and is often a travel stopover location with a variety of accommodation offerings, local pubs, and the Dunedoo Museum. The Dunedoo Show and bush poetry festival attract visitors from across the region each year (Visit NSW, 2020).

4.4 Other renewable projects in or near the locality

Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

The Project is located in the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). REZs are modern day power stations which combine renewable energy generation (such as wind and solar) and energy storage systems (such as batteries and pumped hydro), supported by transmission infrastructure (high voltage (HV) poles and wires).

While the Central West Orana REZ has the potential to bring economic benefits to the Central West Orana region in New South Wales, as with any large-scale development project, there are a range of views and perception on the REZ and how surrounding communities will be impacted.

Through a review of social commentary on the REZ, including submissions reports, media articles and social media, some people are supportive of the Central West Orana REZ, seeing it as an opportunity to create jobs, attract investment, and drive economic growth in the region. Some view the shift towards renewable energy as a positive step towards addressing climate change and reducing Australia's dependence on fossil fuels.

Others have concerns about the impact of the REZ on the environment, particularly in terms of the potential impacts on biodiversity, water resources, and agricultural land. There are also concerns around the visual impact of the large-scale infrastructure associated with renewable energy projects, such as wind turbines and solar panels.

Additionally, some people and community groups have concerns about the impact of the REZ on their communities, particularly in terms the strain on existing community services and infrastructure, such as accommodation, access to medical services and the strain on the local road network. Related to this are changes to the local economy, community cohesion and social dynamics. There are also concerns around the impact on property values, noise levels, and other quality-of-life issues associated with the construction and operation of renewable energy infrastructure.

Given this project is within the Central West Orana REZ, these cumulative impacts are an important consideration.

4.5 Vulnerabilities

Inherent within the SIA process is the need to identify and empower vulnerable groups. “Although vulnerability is context dependent and can include a very wide range of groups, typically the concept includes Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people, the homeless, the poor, those struggling with substance abuse, and isolated elderly people” (Vanclay, 2015).

From the social profile analysis undertaken for the project, it is possible to assess key areas of community resilience and risk in the social locality. The key findings are summarised in Table 4.2 and identifies several population groups as potentially having vulnerability to the social or economic

changes that the project, and the cumulative effects of other developments across the region, may bring. These include:

- **Low-income earners:** people who live in the Mid-Western Regional LGA earn lower than average personal, family and household incomes, when compared to NSW. The median household income is \$1486 when compared to \$1829 in NSW, and median weekly personal income is \$703, compared to \$813 a week.
- **The elderly:** The area has an ageing population. In 2021 the 70-79 years cohort in the LGA recorded the largest population change, showing a 18.1% increase from 2016. The 50-59 years cohort is the most common with 3,551 people. The median age of residents is 42 years, which is notably higher than the state average of 36 years and over 40% of the population is above the age of 50, compared to 35% in NSW.
- **First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:** Aboriginal people account for approximately 6.8% of the Mid-Western Regional LGA, compared to 3.4% of NSW. Understanding and respecting their cultures, histories, and values are important aspects of engaging with Aboriginal people in a respectful and culturally appropriate way.
- **Those with a disability, or of ill-health, requiring medical attention:** according to the 2021 census, over 44% of those living in the LGA are living with a long-term health condition, ranging from arthritis (10.3%) and asthma (9.2%) to a mental health condition (9.2%). This is compared to 39% of those people living in NSW. Overall, a long-term health condition can have a significant impact on a person's perception of their surroundings, both physically and emotionally.

4.6 Social baseline summary

Key characteristics of the social locality include:

- rural community with an ageing population
- notable economic growth and steady reliance on rural based industries
- strong social ties with higher-than-average volunteer rates
- strong connection to country, with Aboriginal persons accounting for a higher proportion of the population when compared to NSW
- strained access to reliable nearby health services.

This baseline also presents some of the strengths and challenges facing communities in the locality and it has been used as a basis, where possible, to assess the social impacts of the project. From a review of the baseline, it is possible to identify several key issues and opportunities for the social locality as listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Social baseline summary

Strengths	Vulnerabilities	Potential implications for vulnerable groups
<p>Diverse economy including growing renewable energy services to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary reduction in social amenity during construction which could have greater health impacts on the elderly or those living with illness or disability. • Impact on livelihoods and existing industry due to changes in land use. • Reduced community cohesion due to differing perceptions on renewable energy and distributive equity, and changes to the population due to the construction workforce. • Reduced access to important community infrastructure including accommodation and housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential further restrictions to access to services for vulnerable groups due to influx of workers for major works. • Improved livelihoods due to access to employment opportunities. • Employment and training opportunities, and opportunities to strengthen community resilience to natural disasters such as drought and floods. • Potential negative impact on existing health conditions, including mental health.
<p>Centrally located to Sydney and Newcastle, as well as other regional centres in NSW.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transport linkages to centres for those without access to a private vehicle or are unable to drive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those without access to a vehicle or a license, particularly younger drivers, First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the elderly have restricted access and limited provisions for assistance. • Access to information about the project may be limited due to accessibility issues and being able to attend information sessions in person.
<p>Diverse natural capital, including diversity of natural resources, heritage items, agricultural lands, and national parks and reserves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competing land uses in the region and managing community perceptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing potential for conflict between different and similar industries utilising the natural capital of the area. • Potential for project to cause intangible harm to Aboriginal communities through cultural and physical loss.

5 Stakeholder engagement

5.1 Stakeholder identification

Stakeholders can be defined as ‘any individual, group of individuals, organisation or politics entity with an interest or stake in the outcome of a decision’ (International Association for Public Participation, 2015). For this Project, a stakeholder analysis has been undertaken to identify people who have an interest in the Project and/or may be impacted by construction, operation or decommissioning. This includes people and groups:

- that are impacted by possible construction, maintenance, operation or decommissioning activities
- with an interest in policy or operational decisions
- with an interest in major project development proposals.

A stakeholder identification process was undertaken during the scoping phase for the project to support the planning and delivery of community engagement to inform the broader EIS, including proposed data collection for SIA. A detailed summary of those people or groups identified during this phase is provided in Appendix 1 and summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Summary of stakeholder identification

People or Group	Details
Associated landholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landowners hosting solar project infrastructure • Properties within the development footprint are privately owned by two landowners
Nearby neighbours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjacent or nearby property owners will potentially experience changes to their surroundings and way of life primarily due to construction and some long terms changes to the visual landscape • 68 neighbouring properties within 5km
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Western Region Council, the local governance in which the Project resides, will experience changes to providing short-term accommodation options and will be interested in impacts on community infrastructure, services, and Council assets such as roads, water, sewerage, waste, and health. Also interested in community benefits associated with the and the broader cumulative impacts of the REZ
Broader community within the social locality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community of Bungaba, Gulgong and surrounds and cumulative impacts associated with the REZ, including access to social services, including longer-term housing and health services, particularly for those with vulnerabilities. Also interested in employment, community benefit and the use of local services
Local businesses and industry groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses potentially impact by the project including primary producers, landscape suppliers, rural services, retail, service and hospitality • Local businesses including accommodation, retail, food and beverage and entertainment providers; medical services, fuel/vehicle maintenance services; as well as a range of business geared to servicing large civil construction projects

5.2 Engaging to collect data

The Guidelines for State Significant Projects refer to the need for secondary and primary data sources to inform the SIA process. This SIA Scoping Report has used outcomes from engagements undertaken by ACEN and Ramboll to help inform the scoping of social impacts. It is referred to as a secondary data source as engagements did not include any representatives from the author of this SIA.

The engagement approach undertaken by ACEN and Ramboll included a series of direct contacts such as phone calls, emails and letter, face to face meetings and a community information session as shown in Table 5.2. The outcomes of engagements and linkages to potential social impact categories are summarised Table 5.3. The proposed research methods for the SIA during the EIS phase, including engaging for SIA as a primary research approach, is discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 5.2 Engagement undertaken by ACEN and Ramboll during scoping phase

Stakeholder	Date	Method	Description
Associated landowners	November 2021-ongoing	Phone / email / letters / face to face	Discussions on the project, updates, land agreements and potential impacts
Nearby neighbours	January 2023 - ongoing	Phone / email / face to face	Discussions on the project with neighbours located within three kilometres of the study area
	31/03/23	Letterbox drop	Letters and Factsheet distributed to residents within five kilometres from the study area to introduce the project and advise of the community information session
Broader community	April 2023	Newspaper article	Information on the project and invitation to the community information session
	20/04/23	Community information session	Community information session held at Gulgong Memorial Hall
	April 2023 - ongoing	Website	Updates via the project webpage: https://acenrenewables.com.au/projects/narragamba-solar/
DPE	13/04/23	Online	Introductory meeting to the project
Mid-Western Regional Council	19/04/23	Face to face	Introductory meeting to the project
EnergyCo	May 2022 on-going	Online / face to face	Regular project discussions as part of Candidate Foundation Generator process

Table 5.3 Engagement outcomes and linkages to social impact categories

Feedback	Social impact category
Nearby neighbours	
Near neighbours wish to see tree screening along Merotherie Road to reduce visual impacts	Way of life Surroundings

Feedback	Social impact category
Near neighbours wish to be engaged in ongoing consultation with ACEN throughout the process	Decision making systems
depreciation of land values / inequitable distribution between neighbours subject to Deighbouring landholder agreements and those who are not eligible	Livelihoods Decision making systems
Broader community, local businesses and Council	
Employment opportunities	Livelihoods
Business opportunities including opportunities for provision of services and accommodation facility offerings	Livelihoods
Additional pressure on existing health care and services	Access
Social Investment Programme (SIP) and community contributions	Community
Traffic and access along Merotherie Road	Access Way of life

6 Scoping of likely social impacts

6.1 Scoped likely social impacts

The scoping phase determined a number of social impacts that require further investigation during the EIS phase. Table 6.1 summarises these impacts and demonstrates the interrelationships that exist between scoped impacts and the social impact categories.

6.2 Cumulative impacts

In this SIA, cumulative impacts refer to the combined effect of impacts from several activities on a particular value or receiver. According to the SIA Guideline, cumulative impacts can take three forms. They can be:

- Spatial impacts: occurring over the same area, such as trucks from multiple operations which may produce a cumulative noise impact along a common haulage route
- Temporal: vary over time, such as the construction of multiple large projects over the same timeframe which may produce a spike in temporary work in an area, creating a cumulative shortage of accommodation
- Linked impact: involve more complex interactions – one impact may trigger another.

The scoping phase found that almost all the scoped social impacts are likely to combine with other impacts from either this project or with impacts from other projects. This is primarily due to the implications of the REZ and the likelihood that concurrent projects may be constructed and be in operation over similar timeframes.

Examples of linked cumulative social impacts relating to this project include:

- Linked impact: construction of the solar project may generate noise and dust, impacting on how people live work and play while they are also experiencing an increase in traffic on local roads.

Examples of temporal cumulative social impacts relating to this project include:

- Temporal impact: similar to the above, multiple concurrent projects occurring in the REZ, leading to impacts on the road network and increasing travel times, and
- Temporal impacts: this Project, combined with the construction of multiple large projects within the REZ may create a cumulative shortage of accommodation in the area and increase the pressure on existing services.

Table 6.1 Scoped likely social impacts

Social impact category	Duration	Impact to people	Affected people	Impact type	Level of assessment in EIS
Surroundings Way of life	Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to amenity resulting from construction, affecting how people live (i.e., because of construction dust, noise and increases in traffic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearby neighbours Vulnerable persons living near the project including elderly and those with an existing health condition 	Negative	Detailed
Culture	Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likelihood of project to cause intangible harm through cultural and physical loss and tangible harm to items of heritage and cultural significance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Community within the social locality 	Negative	Detailed
Livelihoods	Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic stimulus to local business owners resulting from the procurement opportunities and increased patronage Enhanced wellbeing from job opportunities and training, including increased opportunities for vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local business and industry Vulnerable persons living within the social locality including low income earners, youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Broader community with the social locality 	Positive	Standard
Community Access	Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decline in access to affordable housing, accommodation, and community services (including medical facilities) due to the temporary increase in population Cumulative impacts associated with the broader REZ and access to affordable accommodation and community services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community within the social locality Vulnerable persons living within the social locality including low income earners, elderly and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Tourists and accommodation providers 	Negative	Detailed
Health and well-being	Construction and operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential for a decline in safety for those living near the Project due to fire risks and other health-related impacts (EMF/dust/road safety etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community within the social locality, including those with vulnerabilities (i.e. the elderly or suffering from health conditions) Road users 	Negative	Standard

Social impact category	Duration	Impact to people	Affected people	Impact type	Level of assessment in EIS
Decision making systems	Planning and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The perceived inability of people to have a say in changes that impact them, including access to public information and opportunities for engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Broader community within the social locality Nearby neighbours 	Negative	Standard
Way of life Surroundings	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to the visual landscape, something that people value, including impacts from glint and glare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearby neighbours Those in the visual catchment 	Negative	Detailed
Community	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community investment initiatives leading to improved sustainability and enhancing resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community within the social locality 	Positive	Minor
Livelihoods	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to land use affecting the availability of land for agricultural purposes Fear that the presence of the Project will contribute to the devaluation of properties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Broader community within the social locality Nearby neighbours 	Negative	Minor
Way of life	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits of intergenerational equity due to solar farms being used as an alternate energy source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broader community within the social locality 	Positive	Minor
Health and well-being	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential for a decline in safety for those living near the Project due to fire risks and other health-related impacts (EMF/dust/road safety etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broader community within the social locality, including those with vulnerabilities (i.e. the elderly or suffering from health conditions) Road users 	Negative	Standard
Health and wellbeing	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in anxiety and stress regarding scale of development and perceived inability of people to influence change that may affect their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broader community within the social locality 	Negative	Standard
Livelihoods	Operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to existing land use generating an alternate revenue stream for host landholders and to a lesser degree, nearby neighbours, leading to improved resilience through income diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associated landowners Nearby neighbours 	Positive	Minor

6.3 Project refinement and potential mitigation measures

6.3.1 Project refinement history

ACEN Australia first began investigating the study area for potential renewable development in 2018, prior to the declaration of the CWO-REZ. The study area was initially investigated for solar development as part of the Stubbo Solar and Battery Project (refer to discussion in Section 1.1.5.1 in the EIS). It was initially intended that the Stubbo Solar and Battery Project would have a larger capacity and incorporate the study area, however the capacity of the existing 330 kilovolt Transgrid line was limited to 400 megawatts. As such, the study area land was flagged for future development while the Stubbo Solar and Battery Project was developed.

When the NSW Government declared the CWO-REZ in 2020, and then the indicative area for the Merotherie hub in early 2022, it was decided to revive the Narragamba land area. Preliminary assessments such as visual, topography, and land use, had been undertaken to determine the feasibility of a solar project at the study area.

As neighbours of the Stubbo Solar and Battery Project, ACEN Australia has been engaging with the associated landowners since early 2022.

6.3.2 Alternate layouts

Refinements to the project layout were made during the scoping phase which involved the inclusion of the restricted development areas around environmentally sensitive areas (refer to discussion in Section 1.1.2 in the EIS). This informed the selection of the potential BESS and substation locations within the study area (refer to Figure 4-1 in the EIS).

Further refinements to the project layout will be made during preparation of the EIS in response to the findings of detailed assessments and feedback from engagement with the view to avoid or minimise environmental and social impacts.

7 SIA research and engagement

7.1 SIA research methodologies

The Social Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Projects refers to the need for secondary and primary data sources to inform the SIA process. The scoping phase has identified a range of social matters of relevance to various people. These will be assessed during the EIS phase using both primary and secondary data sources to help inform the assessment.

Engagement is both a primary and secondary data source. As a primary data source, engagement will be used to gather first-hand insights into what people value and how they expect the Project to affect them. The SIA will also use outcomes from previous engagements as a secondary data source, for example, feedback received from people during the response to submissions phase on a comparative project such as Stubbo Solar Farm.

Engaging in SIA is important for building trust and collaboration, improving project and policy outcomes, and meeting legal and regulatory requirements. By considering the social impacts of projects and policies, decision-makers can ensure that they are making informed decisions that promote the well-being of all members of society. The SIA process can help build trust and collaboration between decision-makers and community members. This can help to ensure that the needs and concerns of community members are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

The proposed techniques that will be used to achieve the desired SIA engagement outcomes are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 SIA engagement approach and justification

Description	Justification for approach	Targeted people and community groups	Engagement lead	Related social impact category
Engagement Technique: Semi-structured interviews				
<p>Interviews will be used to further explore the social impacts of the project and to collect data, evidence, and insights for those people nearest to the Project most impacted by changes to their surrounding and amenity. They will also be used for focused discussions with key community groups regarding the change in access to community services. The semi-structured interview format provides a flexible structure which allows the interviewer to create and ask questions about situations as they emerge, and the interviewee to digress and express views freely. It will help to inform the assessment for those social impacts identified as needing a 'detailed' level of assessment in the EIS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting to collect information and insights • Understanding the impact of the Project • Improving project and making more informed decisions in relation to proposed mitigation and management measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearby neighbours • Community groups • Local service providers • Representatives of vulnerable groups including the elderly (i.e. Gulgong Pensioners & Superannuants Association) 	SIA practitioner	Way of life Surroundings Livelihoods Access
Engagement technique: Online forums / face to face meetings / workshops or focus groups				
<p>This technique presents opportunities to generate two way discussions with community groups and organisation relating to specific impacts. For example, impact on community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting to collect information and insights • Help to identify the distribution of costs and benefits of the Project among different social groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders 	ACEN/Ramboll with SIA Practitioner	Access Community

Description	Justification for approach	Targeted people and community groups	Engagement lead	Related social impact category
infrastructure and services is a key conversation with Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the impact of the Project • Improving project and making more informed decisions in relation to proposed mitigation and management measures 			
Engagement technique: Open days and contact points (e.g., phone, email)				
Helping people to understand the role of the social impact assessment, identify affected and interested people, groups, organisations and communities. Provide people with a forum to identify social impacts in relation to the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader community within the social locality 	ACEN/Ramboll	All
Engagement technique: Fact sheets / newsletters				
Provide input into project information prepared by ACEN to help people understand the social impact assessment and ways that they can get involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader community within the social locality 	ACEN/Ramboll	All

8 Conclusion

This report documents the process and outcomes of the scoping phase of the SIA undertaken for the project. Specifically, it has:

- Demonstrated an understanding of the project's social locality
- Considered the characteristic of the communities within the social locality (the social baseline)
- Identified likely social impacts for different groups in the social locality and the level of assessment required for the assessment phase.

The report has identified key social matters that will require further assessment as part of the EIS. Future stages of SIA for this project will analyse and predict the unmitigated and mitigated social impacts and develop strategies to avoid or mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive impacts.

Subsequent phases of the SIA program will include:

- A detailed update of the baseline social profile to ensure that any further baseline data relevant to the impacts identified is obtained
- Further validation of the area of social influence and identification of affected communities and vulnerable groups
- Collection of primary research data through participatory engagement methodologies to understand the perceptions of the identified people and community groups within the social locality and those indirectly affected by the project
- A comprehensive assessment and evaluation of social impacts against existing baseline conditions.

The SIA will seek broader involvement across the community over the subsequent phases of the EIS, this includes further engagement with Council, business and the community regarding impacts related to community benefit, accommodation and services.

The scoped issues will be further explored and validated during the EIS preparation phase using several research methodologies, including a participatory and impartial engagement approach to inform the SIA. This engagement will build upon the engagement carried out by ACEN as part of the development of the EIS.

9 References

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Appendix 1 Preliminary stakeholder identification

Stakeholder Group	Details
Associated landowners	Landowners hosting solar farm infrastructure Properties within the development footprint are privately owned by two landowners
Neighbours	68 neighbouring properties within 5km
Nearby towns and broader community	Those residing in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bungaba – 4km east • Gulgong – 17km south • Leadville – 18km north • Dunedoo – 25km northwest • Cope – 10km southeast • Stubbo – 11km south • Tallawang – 13km west • Beryl – 16km southwest • Dubbo – 90km west
Local Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Western Regional Council
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal communities located within the area including LALCs, Traditional Owners and knowledge holders, community leaders, elders, native title holders, service providers and the broader community
Local Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulgong Gossip • www.dailyliberal.com.au (Dubbo) • Mudgee Guardian • ABC Western Plains
Local businesses and industry groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses potentially impact by the project including primary producers, landscape suppliers, rural services, retail, service and hospitality. • Local businesses including accommodation, retail, food and beverage and entertainment providers; medical services, fuel/vehicle maintenance services; as well as a range of business geared to servicing large civil construction projects
Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulgong Pensioners & Superannuants Association • NSW Farmers Association
Project partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil works suppliers, manufacturers and other contractors
Emergency Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW State Emergency Services – Dunedoo • Gulgong Police Station • Gulgong District Hospital • Fire and Rescue NSW - Gulgong
Nearby Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulgong Public School • Gulgong High School • All Hollows Gulgong Catholic School

Stakeholder Group	Details
Employment, education and Training Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and Training Providers Sureway Employment and Training
Environmental Bodies / Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection Authority • Local environmental interest groups
Advocacy Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-Alliance • Renew Economy • Save our Surroundings (SOS)
Government Elected Officials (Members of Parliament)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Dugald William Saunders, MP Member of the Legislative Assembly; Member for Dubbo; Member of The Nationals. • Penny Sharpe, Minister for Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Heritage • Tara Moriarty, Minister for Agriculture, Regional New South Wales and Western New South Wales
State Government Departments and statutory authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) (NSW-Government-controlled statutory authority that will lead the delivery of NSW's REZs) • Department of Planning NSW • Department of Primary Industries • NSW Environment Protection Authority • Transport for NSW • NSW Biodiversity Conservation Division • NSW Central West Local Land Services
Federal Government Departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Environment and Energy • Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development • Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment
Electricity Network and utility and service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACE Energy (appointed as Network Operator for the CWO REZ on 28 April 2023) • TransGrid • Australian Energy Market Operator • NBN Co Limited • Telstra Corporation Limited
Other Infrastructure Developers/ wind farms and / or mining and exploration companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tallawang Solar Farm • Barneys Reef Wind Farm • Bellambi Heights Solar Farm • Birrawa Solar and Battery Project • Valley of the Winds Project • Beryl Solar Farm • Stubbo Solar Project • Gulgong Aeropark

Appendix 2 Authors certification

I, Angela Peace, certify that this SIA Scoping Report contains all information relevant to the SIA for the project, and that the information is not false or misleading. My qualifications and experiences are listed below.

Qualifications and Professional Memberships:

- Bachelor of Arts (Communications)
- Social Impact Assessment Certificate, University of Strathclyde and Community Insights Group (2020)
- Member, International Association of Impact Assessment (membership no. 10499330)
- Member, International Association of Public Participation
- Member, Social Impact Measurement Network Australia
- Member, Environmental Institute of Australian and New Zealand Inc.

Experience:

The author is experienced in social science methodologies and has demonstrated SIA skills in government, private and education settings. She is a Social Impact and Community Engagement Specialist and has managed SIAs for extractive industries, waste recovery, transport infrastructure, recreational facilities and energy projects in NSW and the ACT, including State Significant Projects.

Date: 2 July 2023