

Memorandum

4 February 2025

To: Nestor Tsambos
From: David Richards
Subject: Deeargee Solar and Battery Project - SSD-70753725

Dear Nestor,

This letter has been prepared to seek inclusion of an additional grid connection option for the Deeargee Solar and Battery Project (SSD-70753725). To support inclusion of this infrastructure, the following information is provided:

- a description of the additional grid connection option and the nominated footprint for the transmission line infrastructure (including a map showing the indicative location where it will be constructed)
- a justification for the inclusion of this infrastructure
- the proposed assessment approach for the environmental impact statement (EIS).

No changes to the project summary description in the Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARs) are recommended.

1 Background

ACEN Australia Pty Ltd (ACEN) proposes to develop the Deeargee Solar and Battery Project, a large-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) generation facility and battery energy storage system (BESS), supported by associated infrastructure (the project). The project will be located about 12 kilometres (km) south-east of Uralla and lies within the Uralla local government area (LGA) in New South Wales (NSW). The project is within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

Within the *Deeargee Solar and Battery Project Scoping Report* (Scoping Report) (EMM 2024), it was noted that the project would connect to transmission infrastructure proposed to be built by Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) as part of the New England REZ. Limited details on the proposed New England REZ infrastructure were available at the time of writing the Scoping Report; however, it was anticipated that an 'energy hub' would be constructed south-east of Uralla within proximity of the project investigation area.

As a result of delays to the construction of New England REZ infrastructure, ACEN has identified a need for an additional grid connection option.

2 Additional grid connection option

2.1 Description of the activity

An additional grid connection option has been added to the project and will provide flexibility for the project to connect to either infrastructure proposed as part of the New England REZ (as proposed in the Scoping Report) or an existing 330 kilovolt (kV) transmission line approximately 8 km north of the project investigation area.

To facilitate this option, the project now includes an approximately 14-km-long transmission line easement, which extends from the north-eastern corner of the proposed solar array area to Transgrid's Uralla 330 kV substation, which was built as part of New England Solar (SSD-9255) (Figure 1). New England Solar is a 720 megawatt (MW) solar and battery project currently being built by ACEN in stages. Stage 1 (400 MW) commenced generating electricity in 2023. Stage 2 (320 MW) is yet to commence construction.

For the purposes of the EIS, an approximately 60-m-wide transmission line easement will be assessed and it is assumed this will result in direct impacts to an area of up to approximately 45 hectares (ha) (Figure 1). The transmission line will connect into either New England Solar's Omega BESS or Transgrid's Uralla 330 kV substation, both of which have available points of connection to receive electricity generated by the Deeargee Solar and Battery Project.

The proposed transmission line easement is on predominantly private land. An easement will also be required over Gostwyck Road, which is owned and operated by Uralla Shire Council. Landowner's consent will be sought from all landowners within the proposed transmission line easement.

2.2 Transmission line design parameters

It is anticipated that the transmission line will include a combination of overhead and underground cabling. Towers for the overhead line will be up to approximately 65-m-high with approximately 300 m–400 m between each tower. The type of tower structure used will be determined during detailed design. The underground line will be buried up to approximately 600-mm-deep. Once constructed, the easement width will vary depending on whether the line is aboveground (approximately 20-m-wide) or underground (approximately 4-m-wide).

2.3 Justification for the activity

An alternative grid connection option is required because of uncertainty around the timing of the construction of New England REZ infrastructure. The proposed transmission line easement has maximised use of previously disturbed land and land approved for disturbance as part of the construction of New England Solar (SSD-9255). Approximately 6.2 km of the proposed transmission line easement passes through areas assessed and approved for disturbance as part of New England Solar.

2.4 Assessment approach

The development application for the project will assess and seek approval for:

- disturbance associated with the construction of the transmission line (including biodiversity, Aboriginal cultural heritage, historic heritage, noise, agriculture and visual amenity impacts)
- construction traffic (including consideration of light and heavy vehicle access via Barleyfields Road and Big Ridge Road, which were upgraded prior to construction of New England Solar (SSD-9255))
- impacts associated with the operation of the transmission line (including consideration of visual amenity, noise and electromagnetic fields).

Whilst it's recognised that the *Transmission Guideline – Technical Supplement for Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment* (Technical Supplement) (DPHI 2024) applies to State significant infrastructure (SSI) projects, in the absence of alternative guidance, it is proposed to adopt the assessment methodology prescribed by this guideline to assess the overhead sections of the proposed transmission line that are not adjacent to the existing 330 kV transmission corridor (Figure 1). This will include identification of public viewpoints and sensitive receivers within 1.25 km of the proposed transmission line easement (based on a conservative assumption that the transmission towers will be up to 65-m-high). In line with the setback recommendations within the Technical Supplement, there are no sensitive receivers within 300 m of the proposed transmission line. This setback is based on a conservative assumption that the transmission towers will be up to 65-m-high.

As part of the preparation of the biodiversity development assessment report (BDAR), the project's lead ecologist has consulted with Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Group (BCS) around the proposed additional grid connection option. It was acknowledged that parts of the proposed transmission line easement traverse land approved for disturbance as part of New England Solar (SSD-9255) and that for these areas the BDAR will not include identification and assessment of impacts to biodiversity values using the *Biodiversity Assessment Method* (BAM). BCS recommended that the BDAR clearly demonstrates the correlation between the project's subject land and any approved disturbance footprints of other developments or activities for the full extent of any areas where the BAM is not applied.

Field investigations have been undertaken within the areas proposed to be assessed as part of the BDAR and vegetation mapping and flora/fauna habitat within the proposed transmission line easement is consistent with the proposed solar array area. Most of the proposed transmission line easement consists of derived native grassland with small patches of treed native vegetation. Additional targeted surveys have also been undertaken.

As part of the preparation of the Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment (ACHA) and statement of heritage impact (SoHI), fieldwork has been completed within previously unsurveyed parts of the proposed transmission line easement. The results of this fieldwork will be included in the ACHA and SoHI.

A referral under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) was recently submitted to the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and included consideration of impacts associated with the construction and operation of the proposed transmission line (2024/10071).

3 Closing

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you'd like to discuss this further.

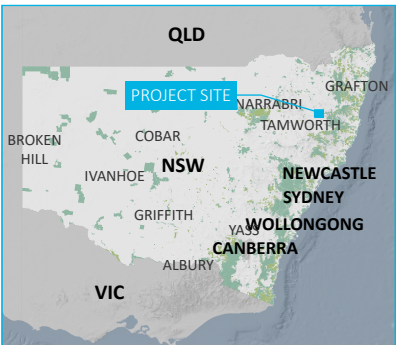
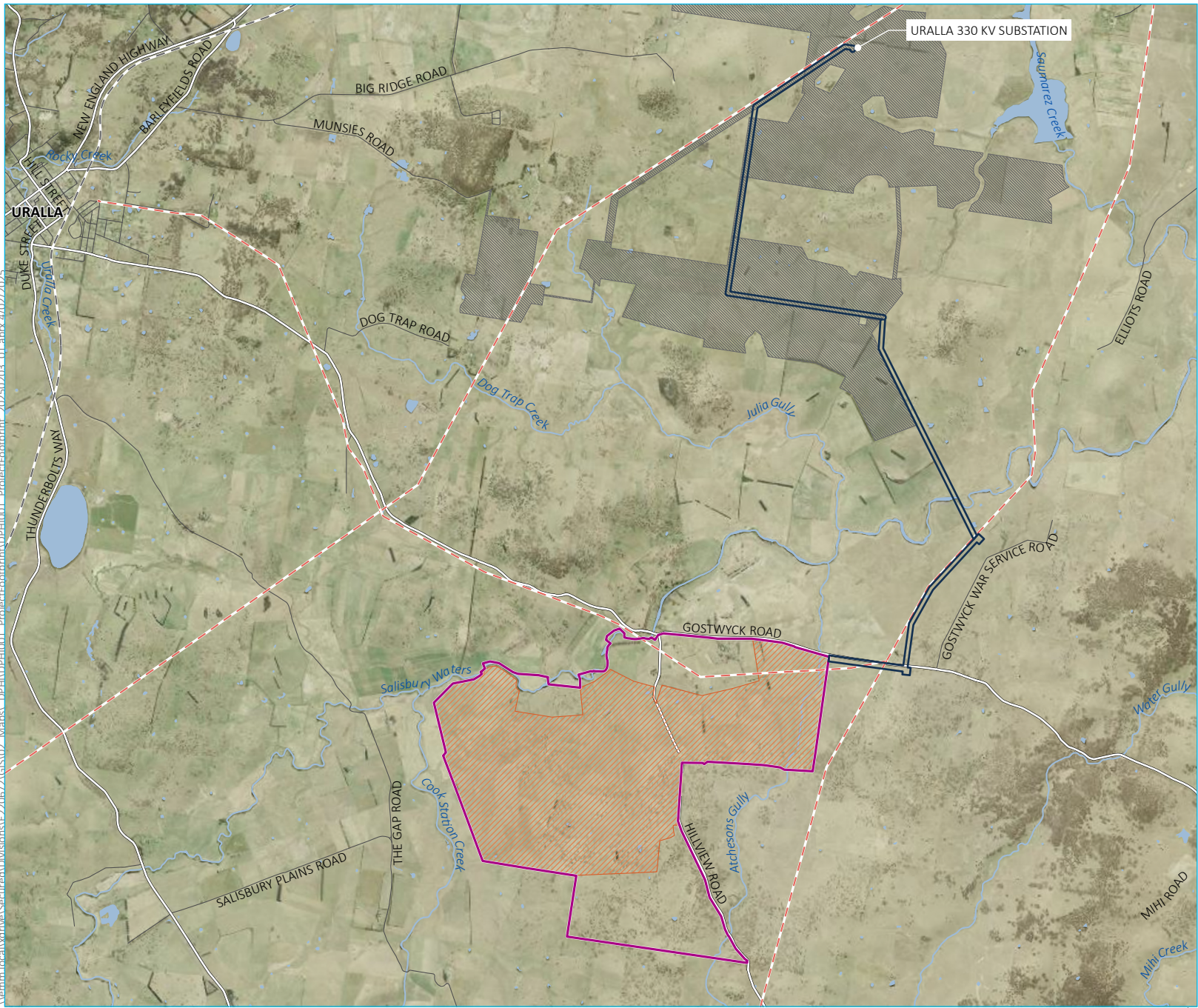
Yours sincerely



David Richards

Associate

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- KEY**
- Project investigation area
 - Development footprint
 - Transmission line easement
 - New England Solar (SSD-9255) approved development footprint
 - Existing electricity transmission lines
- Rail Line**
- Rail line
 - Major road
 - Minor road
 - Named watercourse
 - Named waterbody

Indicative project footprint

Deegee Solar and Battery Project
Figure 1

Source: EMM (2025); DCSSS (2023); LPI (2025)

