

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI)
C/- Major Projects Portal

Attention: kurtis.wathen@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Hillview Wind Farm SEARs (SSD-78329994)

Dear Mr Wathen,

I refer to your request of via 3 December 2024 for advice on the draft Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) for the Hillview Wind Farm project.

Agriculture plays a vital role in supporting state, regional and local economies and strengthening rural communities' social bonds and character. The NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Agriculture and Biosecurity (the Department) collaborates and partners 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 section 4.15(1) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act)*, where a consent authority is required to evaluate a project's potential environmental, social, and economic impacts and the public interest. Sections 1.3(a) and (b) of the *EP&A Act* emphasise facilitating ecologically sustainable development in land use decision-making and promoting responsible resource management that benefits present and future generations.

We understand the State significant project located approximately 12 km southeast of Uralla proposes to utilise 6,124 ha of agricultural land to establish a 55 wind turbine generator (WTG) wind farm (200-300MW), ancillary infrastructure and a temporary 100-bed workers accommodation (TWA).

The project site is composed of highly productive grazing lands, with the majority being classed as Land and Soil Capability (LSC) Classes 3 (1,137ha), 4 (4,799ha) and 5 to 8 (4,810ha), which amounts to 10,746ha, a discrepancy not explained in the Scoping Report. All lands are zoned RU1 Primary Production.

The Scoping Report commits to undertaking assessment of potential agricultural resource impacts and land use conflict, which are covered in the draft SEARs. It is noted that the project layout will attempt to avoid the best quality agricultural land, Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) and LSC Class 3. The site also contains large areas of land mapped as draft State Significant Agricultural Land¹ (SSAL, DPI).

¹ <https://nswdpi.mysocialpinpoint.com/ssal/map#/>

The draft SEARs has been reviewed. The Department recommends that the following key issues be included in the draft SEARs and addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

- A decommissioning management plan that outlines actions for returning the land to its pre-existing agricultural capacity, and a rehabilitation plan for all turbine and infrastructure sites during and post construction with appropriate groundcover management using locally native species to limit dust, weed incursion and other land use conflict issues.
- The proposal includes a 100 person TWA facility. A Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment (LUCRA) should be undertaken to assess the proposed TWA on rural land. This is in addition to the LUCRA for the wind farm during and post construction as required in the draft SEARs. The development of extra accommodation on RU1 Primary Production zoned lands remote from towns or villages increases the potential for land use conflict. The Department considers that the local community at Uralla could potentially benefit from such accommodation in or adjacent to town with suitable infrastructure and utilities.
- Biosecurity management issues during and post construction must be assessed in relation to potential agricultural impacts (pests, weeds, and emergency animal diseases such as Japanese Encephalitis and Foot and Mouth Disease) including a risk assessment outlining the likely plant, animal, and community risks, including at the TWA site. The preparation of a Biosecurity Management Plan as part of the EIS is recommended. Please refer to DPI's [Biosecurity Risk Management in Land Use Planning and Development Guide](#)².

The CSIRO climate impact tool '[MyClimate](#)' indicates that the Gostwyck locality will not experience large fluctuations in temperature minima and maxima, evapotranspiration, or rainfall to the period 2050. This means the area can be regarded as relatively 'safe' for continued agricultural production from a climate perspective, a key advantage of the New England region over other parts of NSW.

In deliberations and weighting of the concept of Ecologically Sustainable Development for this project, intergenerational food security must also be given appropriate and individual recognition so that future production capacity is not compromised. Further to this, the draft SEARs should ensure the assessment of land capability and agricultural productivity is provided as a benchmark to guide the rehabilitation of the site post decommissioning.

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

Sincerely



Nita Scott

Agriculture & Biosecurity
New England and North West Region

6 December 2024

² https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1271241/managing-biosecurity-risks-in-land-use-planning-and-development-guide.pdf