

STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT *Limondale Solar Farm (SSD 8025)*

1. BACKGROUND

Limondale Sun Farm Pty Ltd (the Applicant) proposes to develop a new 250 megawatt (MW) solar farm (the project) near Balranald (see **Figure 1**).

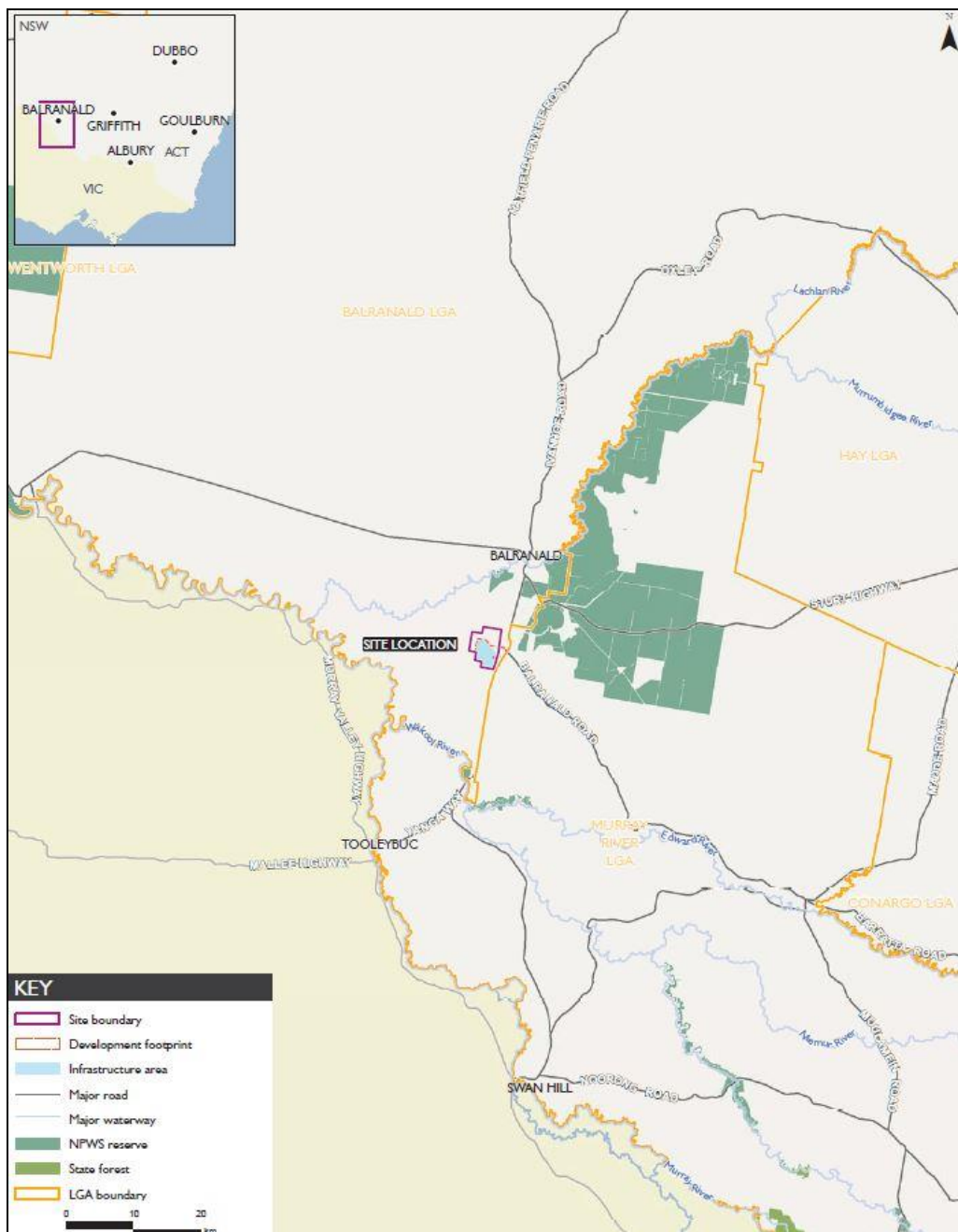
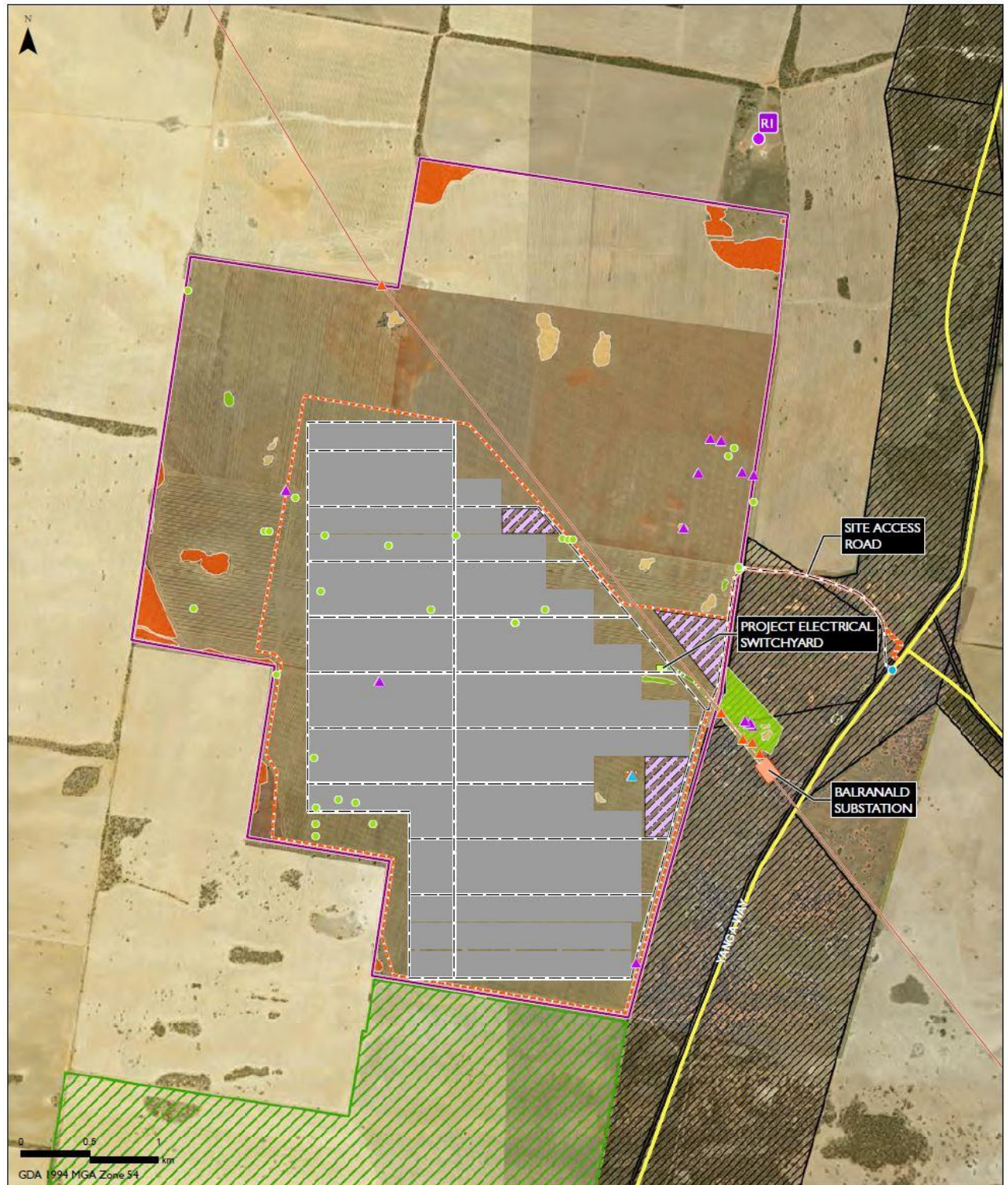


Figure 1: Regional Context



KEY

Source: Overland Sun Farming Company (2017); EMM (2017); Biosis (2017); GA (2016); LPMA (2011); DECCW (2010)






















 Site boundary	 House - ruins	 PCT170 - Chenopod sandplain mallee	 site access intersection
 Development footprint (1,025 ha)	 Aboriginal heritage site / artefact	 PCT23 - Yarran tall open shrubland	 Access track
 Sunraysia Solar Farm (proposed)	 AHIMS sites	 PCT58 - Black Oak - Western Rosewood open woodland (including derived grassland)	 Proposed underground cable
 220 kV electricity transmission line	Vegetation type	 Woody weeds/planted vegetation	 Indicative solar tracking layout
 Major road	 PCT 16 - Black Box grassy open woodland	 Scattered paddock trees (hollow bearing)	 Management hub/laydown area
 Sensitive receptor			
 Travelling stock reserve			

Figure 2: Project Layout

1.1 Project setting

The project site is 2,049 hectares (ha) and is located off Yanga Way, approximately 14 kilometres (km) south of the town of Balranald, which is approximately 230 km west of Griffith. A Crown Land Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) bounds the site to the east. The proposed transmission line (500 m) crosses through the TSR to the Transgrid Balranald substation to the east.

The development footprint within the project site is 1,025 ha. It is relatively flat in nature and consists mostly of cleared agricultural land that has been used for cropping and grazing over several decades.

There are very few landowners in close proximity to the site. The nearest residence is located approximately 2.9 km north of the site (see **Figure 2**), while a further 5 residences are located up to 6 km from the site.

The project adjoins the recently approved Sunraysia Solar Farm to the south. The Department has assessed the potential cumulative impacts of both projects if construction occurred at the same time, including traffic, accommodation and employment considerations.

Balranald has recently been identified as a 'region of interest' for renewable energy projects because it has good solar resources and spare capacity on the electricity network.

1.2 Project description

The project involves the construction of a new solar farm with an initial capacity of 250 MW. It also involves any upgrading or decommissioning of infrastructure and equipment in the future. While the capacity of the proposed solar farm may increase over time as technology improves, the footprint of the development would not increase.

The key components of the project are summarised in **Table 1**, depicted in **Figure 2** and described in detail in the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project (see **Appendix B**).

Table 1: Major components of the project

Aspect	Description
<i>Project summary</i>	<p>The project includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> approximately 868,000 solar panels mounted on single axis-tracker frames (up to 2 m in height); up to 100 inverter stations (up to 2.3 m in height), each containing an inverter and a 33 kilovolt (kV) transformer, and an onsite substation containing a transformer and associated switchgear; internal access tracks, staff amenities, offices, car parking, laydown areas, security fencing; and a 220 kV underground power line connecting to the existing Balranald substation (500 m east).
<i>Project area</i>	2,049 ha (including a 1,025 ha development footprint)
<i>Access route</i>	The site would be accessed via a new intersection with Yanga Way, connecting to an existing access track to the site.
<i>Road upgrades</i>	<p>Key road works for the project include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a new intersection between the access track and Yanga Way; a 350 m section of new access track connecting the intersection and existing track; and upgrading the existing access track (approximately 1.3 km gravelled and compacted).
<i>Operational life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The expected operational life of the initial infrastructure is approximately 30 years. However, the project may involve infrastructure upgrades that could extend the operational life. The project also includes decommissioning at the end of the project life, which would involve removing all above ground infrastructure and underground infrastructure.
<i>Construction traffic and timeframe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The total construction period would last for up to 15 months, and would comprise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a peak traffic period of 9 months (up to 400 light and 54 heavy vehicle movements daily); a non-peak traffic period of 6 months (up to 180 light and 30 heavy vehicle movements daily); 2 over dimensional vehicle movements. Construction hours would be limited to Monday to Friday 7am - 6pm, and Saturday 8am – 1pm.
<i>Hours of operation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The solar farm would operate during the day. Daily operations and maintenance by site staff would be undertaken Monday to Friday 7am - 6pm and Saturday 8am - 1pm.
<i>Employment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 90 full time equivalent workers would be required during construction, rising to 200 during the peak construction period. The project would provide 4 to 7 full time equivalent operational jobs.
<i>Capital investment value</i>	\$150 million

1.3 Strategic context

In 2016, the vast majority of energy in NSW was derived from fossil fuels, including 80.4% from coal and gas, and only 19.6% was derived from renewable energy sources. However, there are currently no plans for the development of new coal power stations in NSW, and the development of renewable energy sources, like wind and solar farms, is experiencing rapid growth.

This is highlighted in the recently released *Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market* (the Finkel Review), which outlines a strategic approach to ensuring an orderly transition from traditional coal and gas fired power generation to renewable energy with lower emissions. It notes that Australia is heading towards zero emissions in the second half of the century.

The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) has adopted the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C, with an aspirational goal of 1.5°C. Australia's contribution towards this target is a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% below 2005 levels by 2030.

One of the key initiatives to deliver on this commitment is the Commonwealth Government's *Renewable Energy Target* (RET). Under this target, more than 20% of Australia's electricity would come from renewable energy by 2020. It is estimated that an additional 6,000 MW of new renewable energy capacity will need to be built by 2020 to achieve the *Renewable Energy Target*.

The *NSW Climate Change Policy Framework*, released in November 2016, sets an aspirational objective for NSW to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. The NSW Government also has a *Renewable Energy Action Plan*, which promotes the development of renewable energy in NSW.

NSW is currently leading Australia in large-scale solar, with four major operational projects, including the largest solar farm in Australia.

With an initial capacity of 250 MW, the project would generate enough power for around 94,000 homes, and is therefore consistent with both the Commonwealth's RET and NSW's *Renewable Energy Action Plan*.

2. STATUTORY CONTEXT

2.1 State Significant Development

Under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) (State and Regional Development) 2011*, the project is classified as State Significant Development (SSD) as it is an electricity generating activity with a capital investment value of more than \$30 million.

Consequently, the Minister for Planning is the consent authority for the development. However, under the Minister's delegation of 16 February 2015, the Executive Director, Resource Assessments and Business Systems, may determine the development application as there were less than 25 objections and a political disclosure statement has not been made.

2.2 Environmental planning instruments

The provisions of the *Balranald Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2010* are discussed in **section 4.1** of this report.

Under the *SEPP (Infrastructure) 2007*, the project is permissible as it involves development for the purposes of electricity generating works. In accordance with the Infrastructure SEPP, the Department has notified Transgrid about the proposed development, and it has confirmed that there is capacity to accommodate the Limondale Solar project.

The Department has considered the provisions of *SEPP No. 55 – Remediation of Land*. A preliminary assessment of the land found no contaminated land within the project site, and the Department is satisfied the site is suitable for the development.

SEPP No. 44 – Koala Habitat Protection does not apply to land within the Balranald LGA.

2.3 Other approvals

Under the *Roads Act 1993*, the project requires approvals from the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) for the proposed road upgrades. Under Section 89K of the EP&A Act, the assessment of the impacts of these upgrades is integrated into the planning approval process, and the conditions of these approvals must be consistent with the conditions of any development consent.

The Department has consulted with RMS during the approval process. RMS has no objections to the project subject to the imposition of suitable conditions. These conditions have been considered by the Department and incorporated into the proposed conditions of consent.

3. CONSULTATION

The Department publicly exhibited the EIS from 27 April 2017 until 26 May 2017. Fourteen submissions were received on the project, including 9 from public authorities, 1 from a special interest group, 1 from a private entity, and 3 from members of the public.

3.1 Agency submissions

The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) has no concerns with the project, providing the loss of 5.32 ha native vegetation is appropriately offset.

RMS has recommended requirements for the intersection upgrade. The Department has incorporated these into the conditions of consent and the Applicant has confirmed it agrees with these requirements. RMS also requested that the Applicant consult with RMS and Council during preparation of the Traffic Management Plan to consider the project's potential interaction with the Sunraysia Solar Farm. The Department has included this requirement in its conditions of consent.

Council raised initial concern regarding community contributions and accommodation during construction. The Department has addressed matters relating to contributions and accommodation in **sections 4.4 and 4.5** respectively.

The Division of Resources and Geoscience (DRG) has confirmed that it is satisfied with the level of information provided regarding the adjacent exploration licence and has no residual concerns with the project.

Transgrid supports the project, and confirmed that the project's connection to the Balranald substation would utilise Transgrid's existing transmission line easement.

The Department inspected the project site with the Applicant and agencies on 4 April 2017.

3.2 Special interest group submission

The Nature Conservation Council supports the project as it aligns with the NSW Government policy to increase renewable energy generation. It also noted the benefits offered by the project through reducing reliance on coal fired power plants, diversifying the state's energy mix and contributing to efforts to avoid global warming.

3.3 Public submissions

A submission was received from the applicant of the adjoining Sunraysia Solar Farm project regarding potential biodiversity, Aboriginal heritage, noise and waste impacts. The Department is satisfied that all matters raised in this submission have been addressed in the Applicant's EIS and Response to Submissions, and reflected in the conditions of consent.

One submission was received supporting the project, while two public submissions (one objecting and one providing comments) primarily raised concerns about the impact of solar energy on electricity security and prices. These matters are addressed in **section 4.6** below.

4. ASSESSMENT

The Department has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the merits of the project. This report provides a detailed discussion of six key issues below, including the compatibility of the proposed land use, biodiversity, traffic, local contributions, accommodation and employment, and energy security.

The Department has also considered the full range of potential impacts associated with the project and has included a summary of the conclusions relating to these in **Table 2**.

4.1 Compatibility of proposed land use

Provisions of the Balranald LEP

The site is located wholly within the RU1 Primary Production zone under the Balranald LEP.

The RU1 zone includes various land uses that are both permitted with consent and without consent. As a solar farm is not expressly listed as permitted with consent or without consent, it is a prohibited land use under a strict reading of the LEP zoning table.

However, based on a broader reading of the LEP, and consideration of the objectives of the RU1 zone and other Council strategic documents, the Department is satisfied that there is no clear intention to prevent the development of a solar farm on the project site.

Firstly, the Balranald LEP expressly references the Infrastructure SEPP and acknowledges that electricity generating works and solar energy systems are regulated by the Infrastructure SEPP, rather than the LEP. As described above, a solar farm is permitted with consent under the Infrastructure SEPP.

Secondly, the project is consistent with the objectives of the RU1 zone, particularly in relation to:

- encouraging diversity in primary industry enterprises;
- supporting rural communities; and
- minimising fragmentation and alienation of resource lands.

The project site is located in an area that has traditionally relied upon agriculture. The introduction of solar energy generation would contribute to a more diverse local industry, thereby supporting the local economy and community.

Thirdly, the proposed solar farm would help Council meet its broader goals around sustainability, climate change and the future economic growth of the region. The *Balranald Economic Development Strategy* (2012) referred to Balranald as a “*shire in decline*” and identified renewable energy projects as a key opportunity for future economic investment. The *Balranald Community Strategic Plan* also emphasises the importance of environmental sustainability and identified solar energy projects as a potential growth area in the future.

Potential impacts on agricultural land

The project site is located in south-western NSW in an area that has traditionally relied upon agriculture. The proposed Limondale and Sunraysia solar farms have a combined development footprint of approximately 1,600 ha. Both sites currently support cropping and grazing.

While the agricultural output from the sites would be reduced by the development of the solar farms, the land represents a very small fraction of the agricultural output of the Balranald area. The combined loss of agricultural cropping land from the two projects would result in a negligible reduction in the overall productivity of the region.

Furthermore, the inherent agricultural capability of the land would not be affected by the projects due to the relatively low scale of the developments. The land may be used for grazing during operations and could be returned to agricultural use after the projects are decommissioned.

Neither the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) – Agriculture nor Council has raised concerns that the operation of the projects would compromise the long-term use of the land for agricultural purposes.

The potential loss of a small area of cropping land in the Balranald region must be balanced against:

- the broader strategic goals of the Commonwealth and NSW governments for the development of renewable energy into the future;

- the environmental benefits of solar energy, particularly in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and
- the economic benefits of solar energy in an area with good solar resources and capacity in the existing electricity infrastructure.

Based on these considerations, the Department is satisfied that the proposed solar farm represents an effective and compatible use of the land within the Balranald region. In addition, the Department has recommended suitable conditions to maintain the productivity of the agricultural land during the construction, operation and decommissioning of the project.

4.2 Biodiversity

Most of the project site is highly disturbed and comprises crops and exotic groundcover. However, there are several isolated patches of remnant native vegetation within the site, and the adjacent TSR (where the site access road and transmission line are located) is largely covered by moderate to good quality native vegetation.

The Applicant has designed the project to avoid patches of native vegetation in the north and west of the site (see **Figure 2**). Only one listed Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) has been mapped in the study area (*acacia melvillei shrubland*), and the development footprint has been designed to avoid this EEC. In addition, the project is located in close proximity to the Balranald substation, and will use the existing Transgrid transmission line easement from the site boundary to the substation, thereby avoiding impacts on vegetation within the adjacent TSR.

Notwithstanding this, 5.32 ha of native vegetation would be cleared for the project, comprising:

- 2.18 ha of Black Box grassy open woodland (PCT 16) within the solar array area; and
- 3.14 ha of Western Rosewood open woodland (PCT 58), including 1.92 within the solar array area, 0.92 ha within the transmission line route, and 0.3 ha within the new section of access track.

Under the *Framework for Biodiversity Assessment* (FBA) the loss of this 5.32 ha requires 158 ecosystem credits to be retired, and OEH is satisfied that the offset credit requirements have been correctly calculated using the FBA. The Department has included this requirement to retire these credits in its conditions of consent.

It is noted that the vegetation type within the new section of access track was assumed to be PCT 58. OEH agrees with this assumption but has requested that, prior to the commencement of construction of the access track, an assessment of the vegetation that will be cleared is undertaken and, if applicable, the ecosystem credit requirements be revised in accordance with the FBA. The Department has included this as a requirement in its conditions of consent.

The project would also remove 18 hollow bearing trees from the site, however none of these are likely to provide key habitat for any listed threatened species. Nevertheless, OEH has recommended pre-clearance surveys of the hollow bearing trees if clearing is undertaken in spring or early summer. The Department has included this as a requirement in its conditions of consent.

One threatened fauna species, the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo was recorded foraging within the study area, however the on-site vegetation does not provide key habitat for any listed species. The project will not result in removal of habitat for threatened species and populations.

The Department has recommended a condition requiring the Applicant to prepare a Biodiversity Management Plan prior to commencement of development. This Plan would outline the proposed monitoring, management and rehabilitation measures that would be implemented throughout the life of the development.

Subject to the retirement of the required biodiversity offset credits and implementation of a Biodiversity Management Plan, the Department and OEH are satisfied that the project could be undertaken in a manner that maintains or improves the biodiversity values of the locality over the medium to long term.

4.3 Traffic and Transport

There would be minimal traffic to and from the solar farm during the operation of the development. Consequently, the only material traffic impacts would occur during construction, decommissioning and major infrastructure upgrades.

The construction period would be up to 15 months, with a peak lasting around 9 months. During the construction peak, there would be up to 54 heavy vehicles and 400 light vehicles visiting the site daily. Two over dimensional vehicles would be required to transport the substation equipment.

Project traffic during decommissioning and major infrastructure upgrades would be similar to construction traffic levels.

Throughout the life of the development, access to the site would be from an entry point off Yanga Way and then along a 1.5 km access track. In order to meet RMS requirements, a new intersection between Yanga Way and the site access track is proposed, which would be located 150 m south of the existing intersection, and constructed at minimum with a Basic Right Turn (BAR) and Basic Left Turn (BAL) treatment. A new 350 m 2-way access track would be constructed to connect the new intersection with the existing access track.

The RMS initially recommended that the Limondale and Sunraysia solar farms share a single site entry point off Yanga Way. However, this was subsequently rejected as the closest viable shared route would require clearing of substantial amounts of additional vegetation through the TSR.

The Department has recommended conditions of consent requiring the Applicant to:

- upgrade the intersection of the site entry point and Yanga Way in accordance with RMS requirements;
- prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan with a particular focus on traffic during construction, decommissioning and upgrading, and consideration of the traffic impacts on the TSR, in consultation with RMS and Council; and
- limit the size of vehicles accessing the site to 26 m.

Subject to the recommended conditions, the Department, RMS and Council are satisfied that the project would not result in significant impacts on road network capacity, efficiency or safety.

4.4 Local contributions

Council requested consideration be given to community contributions to provide funding for local initiatives.

A consent authority has a right to require monetary contributions from a developer under sections 94 and 94A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* when a development is likely to require the provision of, or increase the demand for, public amenities and public services within the area.

While this project would involve an increase of traffic volumes during construction and upgrading periods, there would be no increased demand on Council's public amenities or services as the requisite road upgrades would be undertaken at the expense of the Applicant. The Applicant would also be required to repair any damage on the road network resulting from project-related traffic.

The Department is satisfied that there would be no increased demand on Council's public amenities or services nor any requirement for developer contributions.

4.5 Accommodation and employment

Council raised concerns about increased demands on local accommodation, particularly if construction of the Sunraysia Solar Farm or mining of the nearby Balranald Minerals Sands Mine occur at the same time as construction of the project.

The Department notes that the conditions of approval for the Balranald Minerals Sands Mine require the proponent of that project to construct an accommodation facility for the mine workers. This accommodation facility must be constructed in Balranald town if reasonable and feasible, or on the mine site if it is not feasible to construct in town.

Given the uncertainties in relation to the timing of the various projects and consequent availability of accommodation in the town, the Department has recommended a condition requiring the Applicant to prepare an Accommodation and Employment Strategy in consultation with Council. This is also a condition of consent for the neighbouring Sunraysia Solar Farm project.

This Strategy requires the Applicant to investigate options for maximising local accommodation and employment and to propose a strategy to facilitate the accommodation of the construction workforce.

Subject to the preparation and implementation of the Accommodation and Employment Strategy, the Department is satisfied that the provision of accommodation for workers can be adequately managed.

4.6 Energy security

Concerns were raised in two public submissions that the project, or a combination of the project and a range of other renewable energy projects, could have an adverse impact on energy security in NSW and increase electricity prices.

These concerns were expressed at a high level, and were not supported by any detailed evidence showing how intermittent energy in general could affect energy security and/or electricity prices, or how this project in particular would do that.

This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the Department to evaluate these concerns in any meaningful way, particularly in the context where it is required to look at the planning merits of this particular project.

Any such evaluation, however, would need to have regard to the broader strategic context on these matters.

First, there is strong policy support - at both the Commonwealth and State level - for the increased development of renewable energy projects to ensure a greater proportion of electricity is generated by renewable energy and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with electricity generation.

Second, NSW forms part of the National electricity market. This market is complex, and is governed by a robust statutory framework – at both Commonwealth and State level – covering the regulation of electricity generation, distribution and pricing.

In the Department's view, the likelihood of the project having an adverse impact on energy security or electricity prices in NSW is extremely low, given that it would only add 250 MW of capacity to the National electricity market, which at this stage has a total generation capacity of over 47,000 MW.

Further, any incremental or cumulative impacts associated with the potential intermittency of renewable energy projects could be mitigated through the operation of electricity market.

4.7 Other Issues

The Department's consideration of other issues is summarised in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Other issues

Issue	Consideration	Recommendations
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed solar farm is a relatively low-lying development with panel heights of up to 2 m. The photovoltaic panels are designed to absorb rather than reflect the sun's energy, and the Department is satisfied that the project would not cause a noticeable glare compared to other roofs or building surfaces. There are very few landowners in close proximity to the site, with the nearest residence located approximately 2.9 km north. None of the nearby landowners objected to the project. Visual impacts would be minimal from Yanga Way due to the presence of existing vegetation. The Department is satisfied that there would be no significant visual impacts on nearby residences, significant vistas or road users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that external lighting is minimised and complies with the relevant Australian Standards. Prohibit any signage or advertising on the development, unless for safety purposes.

Issue	Consideration	Recommendations
Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed construction, upgrading and decommissioning activities are predicted to comply with the noise management levels in the <i>Interim Construction Noise Guideline</i> (ICNG). There would be negligible noise during operation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the noise generated by any construction, upgrading or decommissioning activities on site in accordance with best practice requirements outlined in the ICNG. Restrict construction hours to Monday to Friday 7 am - 6 pm, and Saturday 8 am - 1 pm.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project would require approximately 50 megalitres (ML) of water during construction, (primarily for dust suppression) and approximately 5 ML per year during operation (primarily to wash the solar panels). Water would be delivered to the site by truck. DPI Water is satisfied that the project would not have any impact on water supply and demand in the region. Any potential erosion and sedimentation risks associated with the project can be effectively managed using best practice construction techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibit water pollution. Undertake activities in accordance with OEH's <i>Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction</i> (Landcom, 2004) manual. Prepare Stormwater Plans for the site to the satisfaction of Council, and in accordance with Council's guidelines.
Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 Aboriginal sites were recorded during field surveys of the project site. Of these, 11 will be avoided and 5 will be impacted. The 5 sites to be impacted consist of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 sites of low significance (to be salvaged prior to construction); and - 2 sites of moderate significance. The Applicant would be required to undertake detailed text excavations and salvage (if required) of these items prior to the construction of the transmission line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect all heritage items on site, including those that would remain in situ as well as those that are relocated, from any impact. Prepare a Chance Finds Protocol and a Heritage Management Plan. Cease works and notify NSW Police and OEH if human remains are identified over the life of the project.
Mineral Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The north-eastern corner of the site extends into land over which a mineral exploration licence exists. DRG has confirmed that appropriate consultation has been undertaken by the Applicant, and that it has no residual concerns with the project. The Department is satisfied the project is unlikely to have significant impacts on future mineral exploration and that future exploration and/or mine development could be designed to co-exist with the solar farm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No recommendations.
Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project would comply with the National Health and Medical Research Council standards for electro-magnetic fields. There are fire risks associated with all large solar farm developments. These risks can be suitably controlled through the implementation of standard fire management procedures. The RFS advised that the site should be maintained to Asset Protection Zone (APZ) Standards and appropriate measures be put in place to prevent the spread of fire off site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the development contains at least a 10 m APZ and complies with the relevant asset protection requirements in the RFS's <i>Planning for Bushfire Protection 2006</i>, and is suitably equipped to respond to any fires on site. Prepare an Emergency Response Plan in consultation with RFS and Fire & Rescue NSW.
Crown roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DPI advised that the Crown roads impacted by the project should be purchased and closed prior to the commencement of activities, as Crown lands require tenure before any works can be undertaken on them. The Applicant has confirmed that the two Crown roads on site would be purchased and closed prior to the commencement of construction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crown roads on site to be purchased and closed by the Applicant prior to the commencement of construction.

5. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the development application, the EIS, the submissions and the Applicant's Response to Submissions (see **Appendices B, C and D**), and additional information provided by the Applicant and relevant government agencies. The Department has considered the objectives of the EP&A Act and the relevant considerations under section 79C in its assessment of the project.

The Department considers the site to be appropriate for a solar farm as it has good solar resources and available capacity on the existing electricity network. In addition, the site is relatively flat and has been largely cleared for agricultural uses. There are very few landowners in close proximity to the proposed solar farm and none of the nearby landowners have objected to the project.

The project would not result in any significant reduction in the overall agricultural productivity of the region. Additionally, the site could be easily returned to agricultural uses after the project is decommissioned and the inherent agricultural capability of the land would not be affected.

The Department believes the project would assist in transitioning the electricity sector from coal and gas-fired power stations to renewable energy sources. It would generate up to approximately 552,000 MWh of clean electricity annually, which would power about 94,000 homes and save up to 530,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. It is therefore consistent with the goals of the Commonwealth RET and the NSW *Renewable Energy Action Plan*.

The Department is satisfied that the project achieves a reasonable balance between maximising the efficiency of the solar resource development and minimising the potential impacts on surrounding land users and the environment. The project would also stimulate economic investment in renewable energy and provide flow-on benefits to the local community through job creation and capital investment.

On balance, the Department believes that the project is in the public interest and should be approved, subject to conditions.

6. RECOMMENDATION

In accordance with section 89E of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, it is recommended that the Executive Director, Resource Assessments and Business Systems, as delegate of the Minister for Planning:

- **considers** the findings and recommendations of this report;
- **approves** the State significant development application for the Limondale Solar Farm (SSD 8025); and
- **signs** the attached development consent and recommended conditions of consent (**Appendix A**).

Recommended by:



Iwan Davies 30/8/17
Senior Planner
Resource and Energy Assessments

Recommended by:



Nicole Brewer 30/8/17
Team Leader
Resource and Energy Assessments

7. DECISION

Approved ~~Refused by:~~



David Kitto 31/8/17
Executive Director, Resource Assessments and Business Systems
as delegate of the Minister for Planning

APPENDIX A:

Recommended Conditions of Consent

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8025

APPENDIX B:

Environmental Impact Statement

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8025

APPENDIX C:

Submissions

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8025

APPENDIX D:

Response to Submissions

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8025