

STATE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT *Coleambally Solar Project (SSD 8208)*

1. BACKGROUND

Neoen Australia Pty Ltd (the Applicant) proposes to develop a new 150 megawatt (MW) solar farm (the project) near Coleambally (see **Figure 1**).

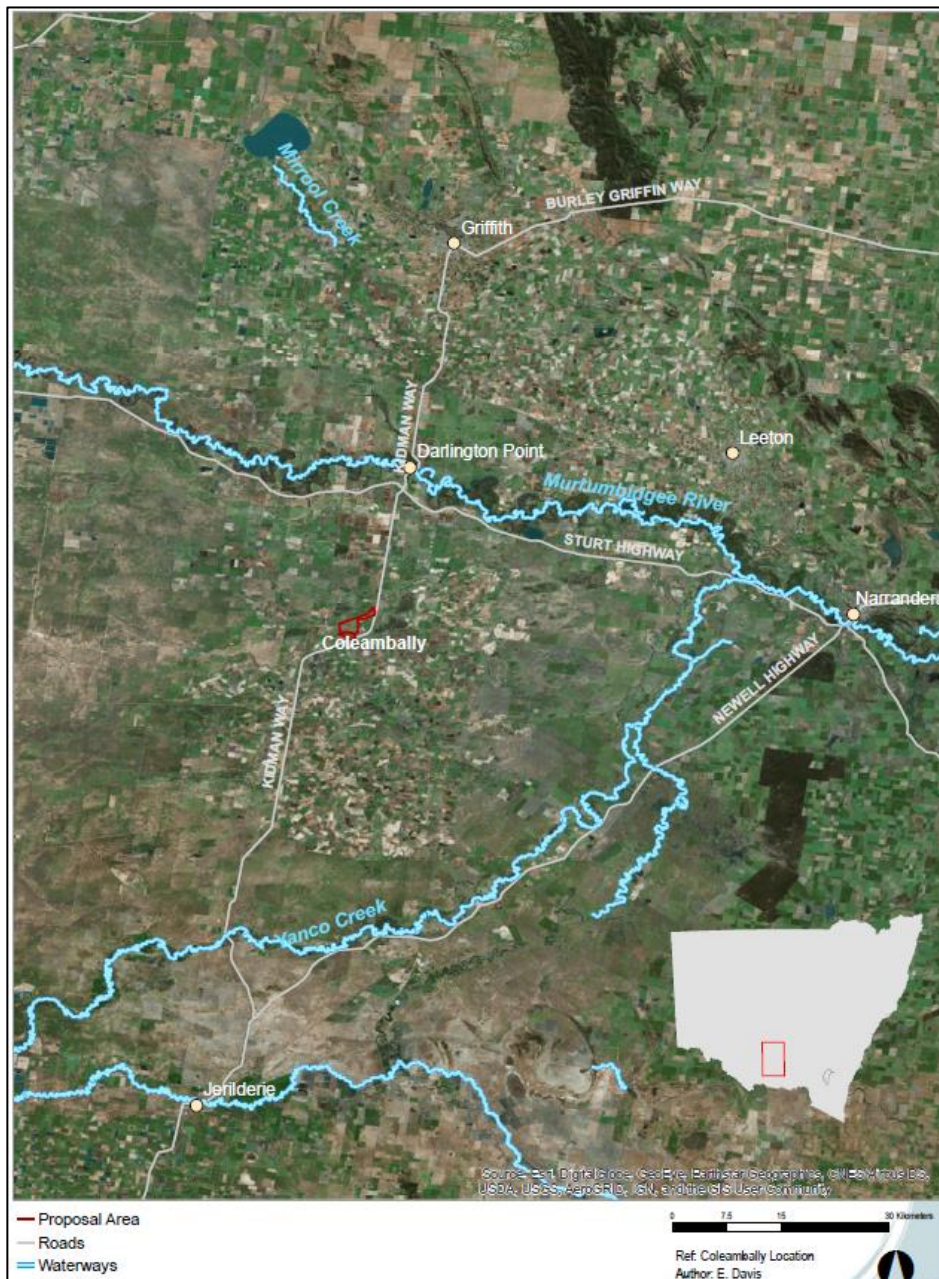


Figure 1: Regional Context

1.1 Project setting

The project site is 570 hectares (ha) and is located off Ercildoune Road, approximately 5 kilometres (km) northeast of Coleambally, within the Murrumbidgee local government area.

The development footprint has been designed to avoid native vegetation. It is flat and heavily disturbed agricultural land, mostly cleared for irrigation cropping and grazing.

There are very few landowners in close proximity to the site. The nearest residence is located approximately 920 m east of the site (one residence), and there are 5 residences located within 2 km of the project.

1.2 Project description

The project involves the construction of a new solar farm with an initial capacity of 150 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 (without a further modification or development application).

The solar farm would connect to the national electricity grid via an underground 132 kilovolt (kV) transmission line, which would extend from the site to the existing Coleambally TransGrid substation.

Key components of the project are summarised in **Table 1**, depicted in **Figure 2** (and associated **Figures 3** and **4**) 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 560,000 solar panels (up to 2.3 m in height) and approximately 80 inverter stations (up to 3.5 m in height); • an onsite substation directly connected into TransGrid's Coleambally substation via an underground 132 kV transmission line, with associated upgrades to the existing TransGrid substation; • internal access tracks, staff amenities, offices, car parking, laydown area and security fencing; • irrigation and drainage channel crossings and access bridges; and • vegetation screening along the southern and north-eastern boundaries of the site.
<i>Project area</i>	570 ha
<i>Site entry</i>	The site would be accessed via an access point located on Ercildoune Road.
<i>Road upgrades</i>	<p>Key road works for the project would involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • upgrading the existing intersection of Kidman Way and Ercildoune Road; and • upgrading of Ercildoune Road, from its intersection of Kidman Way to a minimum of 50 m west of the site access point, to a standard that allows two-way heavy vehicle movements.
<i>Operational life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expected operational life of the initial infrastructure is 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 and decommissioning traffic and timeframe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total construction period would last for 9 to 12 months, and would comprise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a peak traffic period of up to 6 months (up to 140 light vehicle, 50 heavy vehicle movements a day, including over dimensional vehicles); and - a non-peak traffic period of approximately 6 months (up to 75 light vehicle and 20 heavy vehicle movements a day). • Construction hours would be limited to Monday to Friday 7 am - 6 pm, and Saturday 8 am - 1 pm.
<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 7 am - 6 pm, and Saturday 8 am - 1 pm.
<i>Employment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 300 full time equivalent workers required during the construction period and approximately 7 full time equivalent operational jobs.
<i>Capital investment value</i>	\$210 million

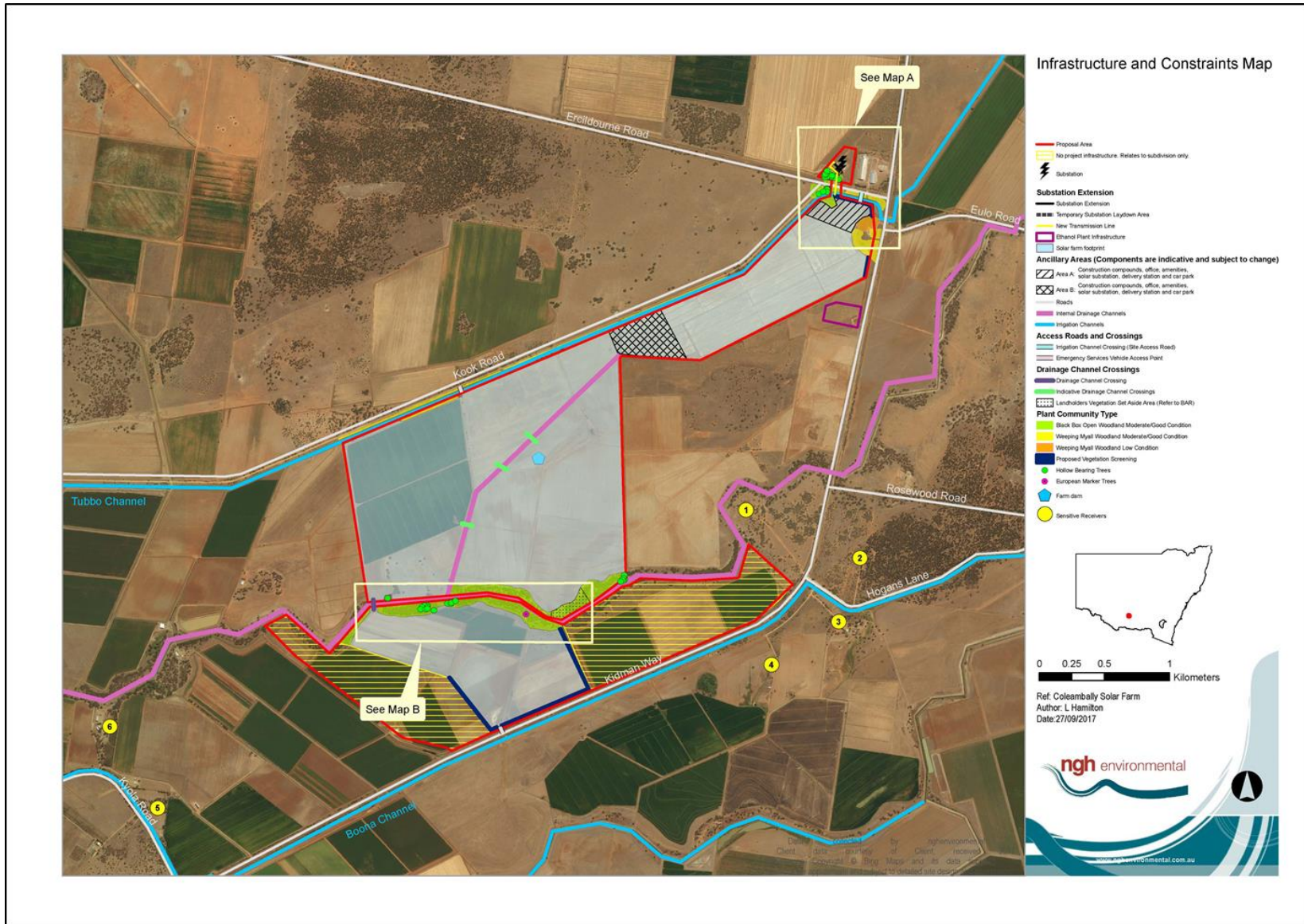


Figure 2: Project Layout

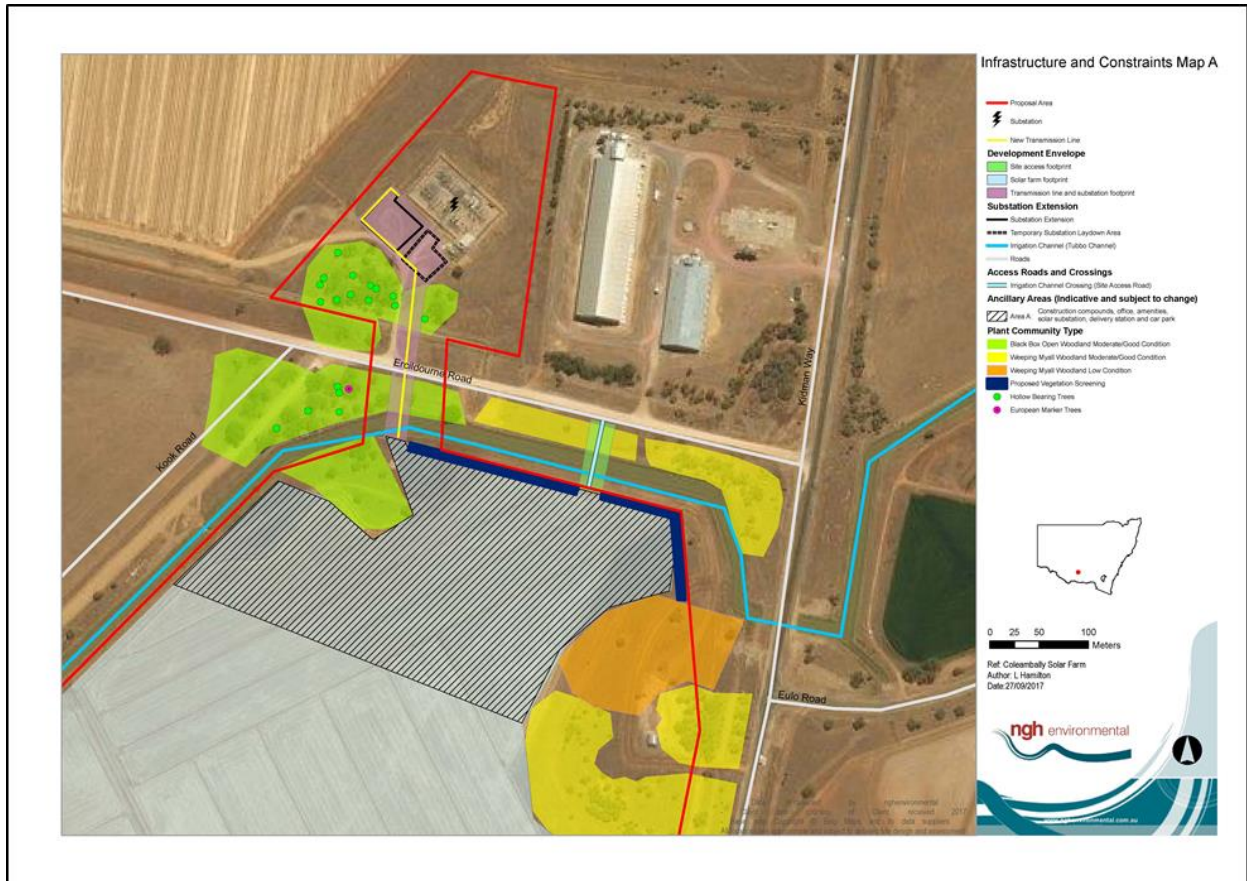


Figure 3: Project Layout – Inset Map A

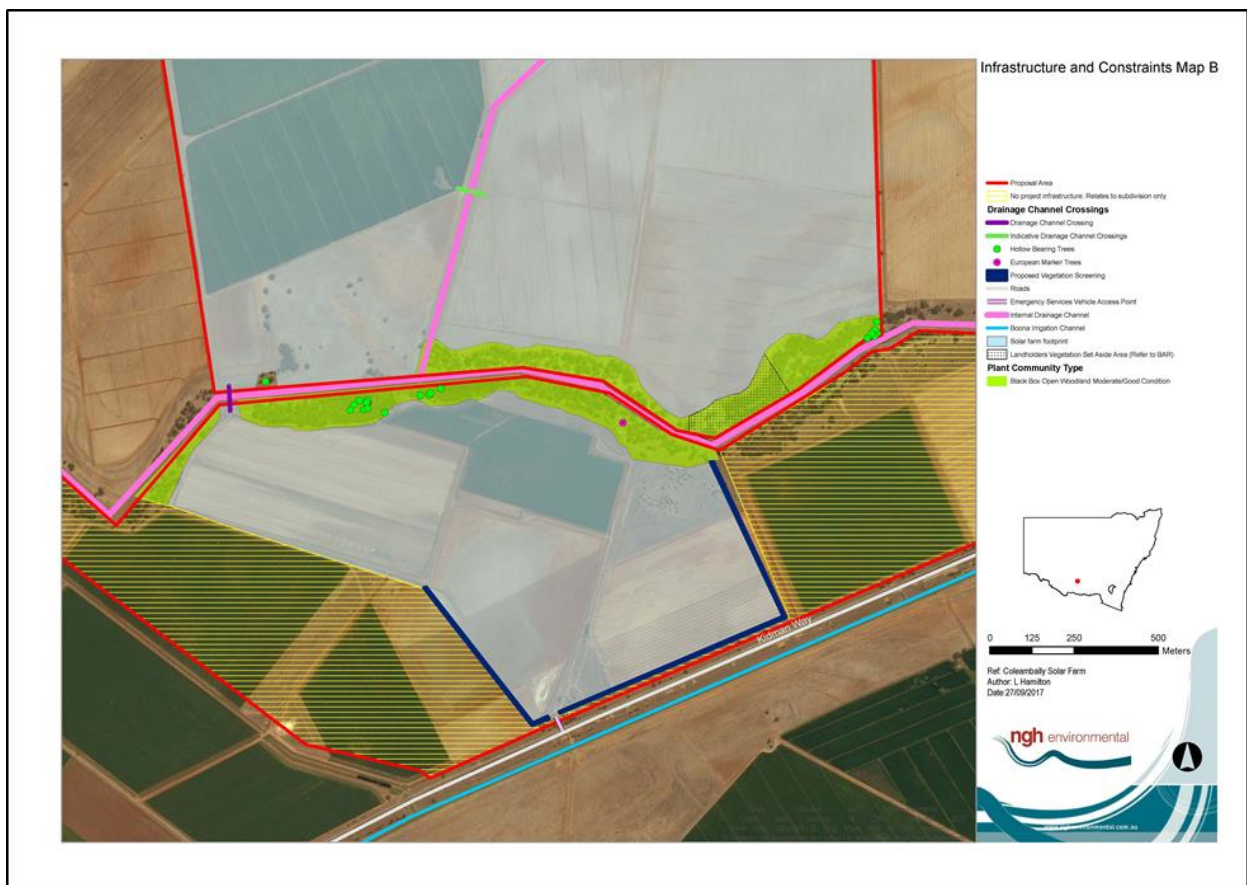


Figure 4: Project Layout – Inset Map B

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 150 MW, the project would generate enough power for around 56,000 homes, and is therefore consistent with both the Commonwealth's *Renewable Energy Target* 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 no political donations have been reported.

2.2 Environmental planning instruments

The provisions of the *Murrumbidgee Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2013* 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 Coleambally Solar project.

SEPP No. 44 – Koala Habitat Protection does not apply to land within the Murrumbidgee local government area.

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.

2.3 Other approvals

Under the *Roads Act 1993*, the project requires approvals from the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and Murrumbidgee Council (Council) 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 both RMS and Council during the approval process. RMS and Council have 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 5 May 2017 until 3 June 2017, and received eleven submissions on the project. These included eight from public authorities, one from a special interest group and two from members of the public.

3.1 Agency submissions

The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) initially raised some concerns with the biodiversity assessment completed for the project. However, these concerns have been addressed in the Applicant's Response to Submissions and through recommended conditions of consent. OEH has no residual concerns subject to the implementation of the recommended conditions, which are discussed in **section 4.2** below.

The former Division of Resources and Energy (DRE) supports the project, as it aligns with the NSW Government policy to increase renewable energy generation, jobs and investment in the State.

Murrumbidgee Council made comment on the project and recommended conditions (primarily related to traffic, transport and channel crossings) to be included in the consent, should the project be approved. Council's recommendations are discussed in **sections 4.3** and **4.5** below.

The recommendations from other public authorities are discussed in the relevant sections of this report.

3.2 Public submissions

The Nature Conservation Council (NCC) supports the project, noting the environmental and social benefits.

Two public submissions were received in objection to the project.

One objection was received from Eagle Energy Pty Ltd, on the basis that it holds a project approval (MP 06_0020 – Ethanol Plant and Diary) that partially overlaps with the proposed solar farm site. While the Department acknowledges this objection, it must assess each development application on its merits and there is nothing preventing the granting of more than one development consent on the same piece of land. The Department notes that consent for the lodgement of the solar farm application has been granted by the landowner.

A second public submission in objection raised concerns about the impact of solar energy on electricity security and prices. These matters are addressed in **section 4.4** below.

4. ASSESSMENT

The Department has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the merits of the project. This report provides a detailed discussion of the four key issues below, including the compatibility of the proposed land use, biodiversity impacts, traffic impacts 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 Murrumbidgee LEP

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

The RU1 zone includes various land uses that are permitted both with, and without, consent. As a solar farm is not expressly listed as permitted with consent or without consent, it would be considered 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 Murrumbidgee 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;
- encouraging sustainable primary industry production by maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base; and
- minimising fragmentation and alienation of resource lands.

Thirdly, the proposed solar farm is in line with Council's strategic objectives relating to sustainability and the guardianship of the local environment. Specifically, the project would improve energy efficiency and increase the use of alternative sustainable energy sources, which are both principles of the *Murrumbidgee Community Strategic Plan (2012)*.

The project would encourage a new element of agricultural enterprise and diversity through the generation of solar energy. The proposed solar farm would not fragment or alienate any resource lands during its operation as it has generally low impacts and it could be easily returned to agricultural land in the future once decommissioned, whilst managed grazing may also occur during operations.

Potential impacts on agricultural land

The project site is located within the south-central region of NSW, which has a strong and diverse agricultural sector. Irrigation cropping and grazing are the most significant land uses in the region.

The project site covers a 570 ha area and currently supports irrigation cropping. While the agricultural output from the site would be reduced by the development of the solar farm, the land represents a very small fraction of the agricultural output of the Coleambally area. The combined loss of agricultural cropping land from the project 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 project due to the relatively low scale of the development. Managed grazing may be used to maintain the height of ground cover during operations and the land returned to agricultural use following decommissioning.

Further, the Department notes that neither Council nor the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) – Agriculture raised concerns that the operation of the project would compromise the long-term use of the land for agricultural purposes.

The potential loss of a small area of cropping and/or grazing land in the region must be balanced against:

- the broader strategic goals of the Commonwealth and NSW governments for the development of renewable energy;
- 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 region.

In addition, the Department has recommended suitable conditions to maintain the productivity of the agricultural land during the construction and operation of the project and to fully reinstate the agricultural capability of the land following the decommissioning of the project.

4.2 Biodiversity

The project site comprises agricultural land that is mostly cleared, highly disturbed and laser levelled, as it was historically used for irrigation cropping. Irrigation and drainage channels intersect and border the site.

Isolated patches of remnant native woodland vegetation, comprising two distinct plant community types, Black Box woodland and Weeping Myall woodland, are located in the south and northeast of the project site.

The Applicant has sought to avoid and minimise the biodiversity impacts of the project by locating the solar arrays and other key project components in mostly cleared and disturbed land.

Notwithstanding this, 0.74 ha of the Black Box woodland and Weeping Myall woodland, both of moderate to good condition, would be cleared for the project. The vegetation clearing would be required at the site access point, the irrigation channel crossing in the south of the site, and for installation of the underground transmission line. The Department notes that Weeping Myall woodland is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (TSC Act). The Department and OEH accept these impacts and acknowledge the retention of this small amount of vegetation would have impacts on the layout and access of the project.

Under the transitional arrangements of the recently commenced *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, offsets for this project are to be assessed under the existing *NSW Biodiversity Offsets Policy for Major Projects and the Framework for Biodiversity Assessment* (FBA). The Department has recommended conditions requiring the biodiversity impacts to be offset in accordance with NSW Biodiversity Offsets Policy. The Applicant has calculated the ecosystem offset credits in accordance with the FBA, and OEH has confirmed that the loss of Black Box woodland and Weeping Myall woodland would require 27 ecosystem credits be retired.

Three threatened flora species and one threatened fauna species were presumed present on the site. The Applicant has calculated that these four threatened species generate an additional 8,357 species credits, which have been added to the overall offset credit calculation.

The Applicant has proposed to undertake additional seasonal surveys between September 2017 and November 2017 and review the offset credit requirements in accordance with the FBA. The Department, in consultation with OEH, has included conditions of consent that allow for the offset credit liability to be reviewed and updated based on these seasonal surveys.

In addition, the Applicant must prepare a Biodiversity Management Plan prior to commencement of development, which would include measures to manage and minimise impacts to biodiversity.

OEH recommended pre-clearance surveys of the 6 hollow bearing trees on site if clearing is undertaken between 1 September and 1 January. OEH also raised concerns over potential impacts to fauna caused by interaction with barbed wire on the perimeter fencing. The Department has addressed these concerns in the Biodiversity Management Plan conditions of consent.

Subject to the recommended conditions, 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

Site access would be via Kidman Way and Ercildoune Road (see **Figures 2 and 3**). Kidman Way is an RMS road which serves as a key transport route for traffic travelling to local, regional and interstate locations. Ercildoune Road is a Council-controlled road utilised by local traffic.

The main increase in traffic volumes associated with the project would occur during the 9 to 12 month construction period, which would include a peak period of up to 6 months. Project decommissioning or upgrading of any infrastructure or equipment may also result in minor increases in traffic volumes.

The estimated maximum daily vehicle movements during construction and decommissioning would be 140 light vehicle and 50 heavy vehicle movements (inclusive of over-dimensional vehicle movements). There would be minimal vehicle movements during operations.

RMS recommended that Basic Right Turn (BAR) and Basic Left Turn (BAL) treatments are constructed at the intersection of Kidman Way and Ercildoune Road. In addition, both RMS and Council advised that Ercildoune Road is widened and sealed for at least 50 m from its intersection with Kidman Way. RMS also advised that the two Emergency Services Vehicle Access points (see **Figure 2**), should not be used by project vehicles during construction or operation.

The Department has recommended conditions requiring the Applicant to:

- undertake the relevant road upgrades prior to the commencement of construction;
- ensure the length of vehicles accessing the site does not exceed 26 m;
- ensure the number of vehicles does not exceed:
 - 50 heavy vehicle movements a day during construction, upgrading or decommissioning;
 - 7 heavy vehicle movements a day during operations;
- ensure only emergency services vehicles access the Emergency Services Vehicle Access points; and
- prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan in consultation with RMS and Council.

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 Energy security

Concerns were raised in one public submission 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 the renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with any 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 150 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 the electricity market.

4.5 Other Issues

A summary of the Department's consideration of other issues is provided 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 2.3 m and inverters up to 3.5 m. The surrounding landscape is flat and comprises multiple irrigation channels and scattered vegetation that would largely screen any views of the project. Six residences are located within 2 km of the project site. The nearest residence is located 920 m to the east of the site and has partial views of the project site. The Applicant has committed to establishing supplementary visual impact mitigation measures at the residence which would effectively screen views from this residence. The remaining residences are all located over 1.2 km from the project site. Views from these residences would be distant and screened by existing vegetation. Visual impacts would be minimal from Kidman Way and Ercildoune Road due to the distance from the road, the presence of existing vegetation and additional vegetation screening at the perimeter of the site. 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. The Department is satisfied that there would be no significant visual impacts on the surrounding residences, significant vistas or road users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and maintain a mature vegetation buffer around the site to effectively screen views of the project from surrounding residences and motorists travelling along Kidman Way and Ercildoune Road. Prepare a Landscaping Plan for the site in consultation with RMS, OEH, Council and the owner of the nearest residence, which includes a detailed description of measures to ensure effectiveness of the vegetation buffer, including a monitoring and reporting program. 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.
Irrigation and Drainage Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tubbo Channel is located along the northern boundary of the site. It supplies downstream users and intersects the project site at the site access point. A bridge is proposed to cross the channel at the site access point (see Figure 3). In addition, two unnamed drainage channels are located in the southern area of the site (see Figure 4). One drainage channel, intersecting the southern area of the site, receives flows from upstream farming operations and rainfall events and a bridge is proposed to cross this channel. A second drainage channel located in the centre of the site, receives overland flows when the land is irrigated. This channel would not be required once the solar farm is operational as it would not be irrigated. The crossing of this channel does not require a bridge. DPI Water and Council advised that any potential erosion and flooding risks associated with works on the irrigation and drainage channels, including bridge crossings, can be effectively managed using best practice construction techniques and if all works are completed in consultation with DPI Water and Council and consistent with DPI's Guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure any works associated with irrigation and drainage channels are consistent with DPI Water's guidelines for <i>Controlled Activities on Waterfront Land (2012)</i>. All bridge crossings of irrigation and drainage channels should be constructed to allow movement of heavy vehicles up to 26 m in length. Consult with relevant landowners, including Coleambally Irrigation Co-Operative and Council, prior to works associated with irrigation or drainage channels.
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 (ICNG)</i>. The Department considers construction noise can be minimised by implementing the noise mitigation work practices set out in the EIS and in Tables 5 and 8 of the ICNG. These include scheduling activities to minimise noise, using quieter equipment, informing the immediately surrounding landowners and establishing a complaints handling procedure. 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, and at no time on Sundays and NSW public holidays.
Subdivision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Applicant has proposed to subdivide two existing lots located in the south of the site into three lots. One of the three subdivided lots would be used for solar arrays and is permissible under the Infrastructure SEPP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subdivide the proposed lots providing information is provided in accordance with requirements of section 157 of the

Issue	Consideration	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, two of the three subdivided lots would continue to be used for agricultural purposes and are prohibited under a strict reading of the LEP as they would not meet the minimum lot size for RU1 land (200 ha). • Notwithstanding, development consent for the project as a whole can be granted despite the subdivision component of the application being prohibited by the LEP (under section 89E(3) of the EP&A Act). • In this case, the Department is satisfied that the subdivision should be approved as part of the project as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ it would ensure agricultural practices can continue on the land that is not required by solar farm operations; ○ it would not result in the addition of any dwelling entitlements on the subdivided lots; and ○ it is consistent with key objectives of the RU1 zone as it would encourage diversity in primary industry enterprises and minimise conflict between land uses. 	<p><i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000.</i></p>
Water and Erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project would require approximately 50 megalitres (ML) of water during construction (primarily for dust suppression), and approximately 1.5 megalitres per year during operation (primarily to wash the solar panels). • The water source for construction and operation is likely to be either groundwater from offsite delivered to site by truck, or extracted from an on-site irrigation channel, via an agreement with the landowner. • 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.
Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Database searches and on-site inspections did not identify any Aboriginal sites within the project boundary. • Three European marker trees were identified within the project boundary during on-site inspections. These trees would be avoided during construction and would not be impacted by the proposal. • Given the highly disturbed nature of the site, the likelihood of identifying unexpected items during construction is low. If Aboriginal artefacts or skeletal material are identified, all work would cease and the Chance Finds Protocol would be implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cease works and notify the NSW Police and OEH if human remains are identified over the life of the project. • Prepare a Chance Finds Protocol. • Protect all heritage items on site, including those that would remain in situ as well as those that are relocated, from any impact.
Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project would comply with the National Health and Medical Research Council standards for electromagnetic 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. Fire and Rescue NSW recommended a Emergency Response Plan to be prepared for the development outlining how these risks would be managed. • The Rural Fire Service advised that the site should be maintained to Asset Protection Zone Standards, including a 10 m asset protection zone, and that a Fire Management Plan be implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare an Emergency Response Plan in consultation with the Rural Fire Service and Fire & Rescue NSW. • Prepare a Fire Management Plan in consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area Fire Control Centre. • Ensure that the development complies with the relevant asset protection requirements in the RFS's <i>Planning for Bushfire Protection 2006</i> (or equivalent). • Establish on-site water tank dedicated for firefighting purposes (as referred to in EIS).
Mineral Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The former DRE did not identify any potential resource sterilisation issues with the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No recommendations.

5. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the development application, the EIS, the submissions, 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 objects 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, is relatively flat and has been largely cleared for agricultural uses. In addition, the site is located close to the electricity grid, which has spare capacity to accommodate any electricity generated by 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.

Potential visual impacts of the solar farm on surrounding residences could also be managed through the establishment of vegetation buffers along the southern and north-eastern boundary of the project, and supplementary visual impact mitigation measures at the nearest residence.

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 331,000 MWh of clean electricity annually, which would power about 56,000 homes and save up to 317,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. Consequently, it is 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 use of the solar resources on site and spare capacity in the electricity grid, 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

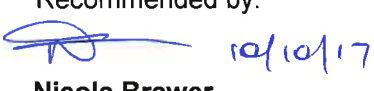
For the purpose of section 89E of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, it is recommended that the A/Deputy Secretary, Planning Services, as delegate of the Minister for Planning:

- **consider** the findings and recommendations of this report;
- **approve** the application in respect of State significant development Coleambally Solar Farm (SSD 8208); and
- **sign** the attached development consent (**Appendix A**).

Recommended by:


 10/10/17
Tim Stuckey
 Planning Officer
 Resource and Energy Assessments

Recommended by:

 10/10/17
Nicole Brewer
 Team Leader
 Resource and Energy Assessments

7. DECISION

The recommendation is Approved Not approved by:

 13/10/17
David Kitto
 A/Deputy Secretary, Planning Services
 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=8208

APPENDIX B:

Environmental Impact Statement

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8208

APPENDIX C:

Submissions

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8208

APPENDIX D:

Response to Submissions

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8208

APPENDIX E: **Additional Information**

See website at http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=8208
