

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Finley Solar Project

Substation Upgrade Modification (SSD 8540 MOD 1)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ESCO Pacific Pty Ltd (ESCO) is seeking to modify the Finley Solar project (the project) by relocating and amending the infrastructure required to connect the project to the transmission network. The proposed modification involves extending the project boundary to include the Finley substation, and undertaking augmentation works to TransGrid's existing Finley substation.

The Department's assessment has concluded that the modification would not result in any significant impacts beyond those that were previously assessed and approved.

1. BACKGROUND

ESCO has approval to construct and operate the Finley Solar project, a 170 megawatt (MW) solar farm located approximately 6 kilometres (km) west of Finley, and 45 km east of Deniliquin in the Berrigan Shire local government area.

On 29 January 2018, the Executive Director, Resource Assessments and Business Systems, as delegate of the Minister for Planning, granted approval for the project. The consent allows for the construction, upgrading and decommissioning of a solar farm, including:

- up to 500,000 solar panels (up to 4 meters (m) high) and approximately 35 inverter stations (up to 3 m high);
- an onsite substation (including a new transformer) directly connected into TransGrid's Finley substation via an underground 132 kilovolt (kV) transmission line, with associated upgrades to the existing TransGrid substation;
- internal access tracks, staff amenities, offices, car parking, laydown area and security fencing; and
- vegetation screening along the boundaries of the site.

2. PROPOSED MODIFICATION

ESCO has advised the project can achieve a more efficient and economically viable connection to the grid by undertaking augmentation works to TransGrid's existing Finley substation (see **Figure 1**). ESCO has identified this as an alternative to connecting to the grid via the approved switchyard, located in the northeast of the project's development footprint.

To facilitate this change, ESCO is requesting to amend the layout and extend the project boundary to include the Finley substation and associated land parcel (Lot B DP 961693). In addition to amending the project layout, the schedule of lands for the project would need to be amended to include Lot B DP 961693.

The proposed augmentation works to the Finley substation would be largely completed within the existing substation footprint and would include a minor bench extension (up to 2,000 square meters) to accommodate specific transmission components such as switchgear, transformer and circuit breaker bay.

Access to the substation for the augmentation works would be via an existing access point off Canalla Road, approximately 100 m north of the project's approved access point.

TransGrid did not raise any concerns in relation to the augmentation works to its substation, and would maintain ownership and management responsibility of the substation and Lot B DP 961693.

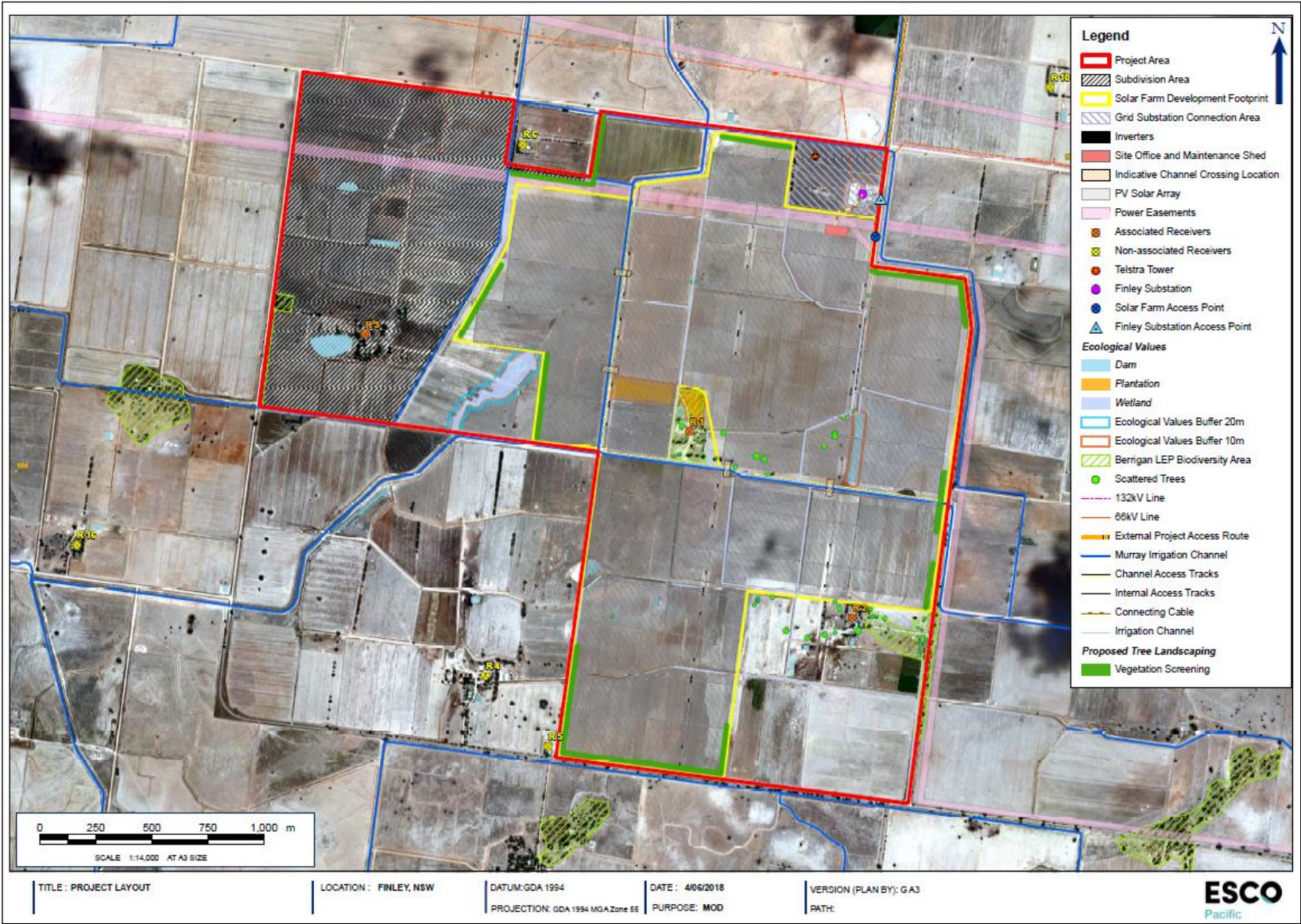


Figure 1: Proposed project layout including Lot B DP 961693

2. STATUTORY CONTEXT

The project was originally approved under Section 4.38 (previously Section 89E) of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) and any modification to this consent must be made under Section 4.55 of the EP&A Act.

Based on its assessment, the Department is satisfied that the application can be characterised as a modification to the existing consent as the proposal would neither significantly alter the approved layout or disturbance area of the development, nor would it significantly increase the environmental impacts of the development as approved.

The Minister for Planning is the approval authority for the application. However, under the Minister's delegation dated 11 October 2017, the Director, Resource and Energy Assessments, may determine the proposed modification as Berrigan Shire Council did not object to the proposal and a political disclosure statement has not been made.

3. CONSULTATION

The Department made the application and modification documentation publicly available on its website from 15 May 2018. Given the minor nature of the application, the Department did not formally seek submissions on the application, but referred the application to the Office of Environment and Heritage and Berrigan Shire Council for advice. Neither agency raised concerns about the modification.

4. ASSESSMENT

In assessing the merits of the proposal, the Department has considered the:

- existing conditions of consent;
- project Environmental Impact Statement;
- modification application and supporting information;
- relevant environmental planning instruments, policies and guidelines; and
- requirements of the EP&A Act.

The Department has considered the relevant issues in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Assessment of Issues

Issue	Consideration	Recommendation
<i>Biodiversity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed augmentation works on Lot B DP 961693 would be largely confined to within the existing Finley substation footprint, and ESCO has confirmed there would be minimal disturbance to the remaining portion of Lot B DP 961693. No vegetation clearance would be required for the proposed works. • Biodiversity assessments undertaken for the project on land adjacent to the proposed works did not identify any threatened flora species or ecological communities. The assessment concluded their presence would be unlikely given the heavily modified nature of the site. • The Department notes the small area of land on Lot B DP 961693 is of a similar condition to the adjacent project site, and while it is not currently used for agricultural purposes, the land has been heavily disturbed in the past. • The Department considers that the modification would not significantly increase impacts to biodiversity values as approved, including impacts to threatened species or endangered ecological communities, and it is satisfied that existing conditions of consent would effectively mitigate any further impacts to these values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with existing conditions. • Update the Biodiversity Management Plan to incorporate the modification.
<i>Aboriginal Heritage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project site does not contain any known Aboriginal heritage items. Desktop studies undertaken by ESCO for Lot B DP 961693 did not identify any Aboriginal items within the substation site. • Due to the highly disturbed nature of the Lot B DP 961693, the potential for unidentified items is considered low. • ESCO has confirmed there would be minimal disturbance to areas outside of the existing substation footprint on Lot B DP 961693. • The Department considers the risk of impact to Aboriginal heritage items is low, and that the existing conditions of consent (including 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with existing conditions.

Issue	Consideration	Recommendation
	the requirement for a Chance Finds Protocol) would be adequate to manage any unexpected Aboriginal heritage items found on site.	
<i>Amenity (Noise and Visual)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noise levels associated with the augmentation works would result in a negligible change to the noise levels associated with the approved project, and would remain below the noise affected criterion of 40 db(A) and well below the highly affected noise level of 75db(A) in the <i>Interim Construction Noise Guideline</i>. The operational noise levels would not change as a result of the proposal. In relation to visual impacts, the augmentation works to the Finley substation would not be visually significant as the appearance of the infrastructure would largely remain the same and the works would be within 150 m from the approved switchyard location. This is not expected to result in any material changes to the visual impacts at the closest receiver (R10). Consequently, the Department considers the modification would not result in any significant amenity impacts beyond those that were assessed and approved for the original project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with existing conditions.
<i>Traffic and transport</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The modification would not increase the number of vehicles that were assessed and approved for the construction and operation of the project. An existing access point to Lot B DP 961693 is located on Canalla Road, approximately 100 m north of the project's approved access point. The access point for Lot B DP 961693 would only be used during the augmentation works, and access would be limited to personnel undertaking the works. There would be no access between the approved project site and Lot B DP 961693. The transport route for construction vehicles undertaking the augmentation works would not change from the route approved for the original project. Subject to the existing conditions, the Department is satisfied that the modification would not result in unacceptable impacts on the capacity, efficiency or safety of the road network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with existing conditions. Include access point on Lot B DP 961693 for augmentation works. Update the Traffic Management Plan to incorporate the modification.
<i>Water and soil erosion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the proposed upgrade may result in a minor increase to the area of disturbance, the augmentation works are not expected to cause any water or erosion impacts, and the existing consent includes requirements for a Stormwater Plan and Erosion and Sediment Control Plan. The Department is satisfied that the modification does not alter the impact to soil and water from the project and can be managed by the existing approval conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comply with existing conditions. Update the Stormwater Plan and Erosion and Sediment Control Plan to incorporate the modification.

5. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

The Department has drafted a recommended Notice of Modification (see **Appendix B**), and a consolidated version of the development consent as modified (see **Appendix C**).

The amended conditions of consent include updating the project layout map and schedule of lands.

ESCO has reviewed the proposed changes to the conditions and does not object to them.

6. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the modification application in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements, having regard to the modification justification, agency advice and documentation relating to the original project.

The Department's assessment has found that the proposed modification would not result in any significant impacts beyond those that were assessed and approved for the original project.

Consequently, the Department is satisfied that the proposed modification is in the public interest and should be approved.

7. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the A/Director, Resource and Energy Assessments, as delegate of the Minister for Planning:


- **consider** the findings and recommendations of this report;
- **determine** that the modification request falls within the scope of section 4.55(1A) of the EP&A Act;
- **modify** the development consent (SSD 8540); and
- **sign** the attached notice of modification (**Appendix B**).

Recommended by:

 30/5/18

Georgia King
Student Planner
Resource and Energy Assessments

Recommended by:

 30/05/18

Tim Stuckey
A/Senior Environmental Assessment Officer
Resource and Energy Assessments

8. DECISION

The recommendation is Approved / Not approved by:

 4/6/18

Phillipa Duncan
A/Director
Resource and Energy Assessments
as delegate of the Minister for Planning

APPENDIX A:

MODIFICATION DOCUMENTATION

See website at http://www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=9346

APPENDIX B:

NOTICE OF MODIFICATION

See website at http://www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=9346

APPENDIX C: CONSOLIDATED CONSENT

See website at http://www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view_job&job_id=9346