



Wongalea Battery Energy Storage System

Aboriginal & Historical Heritage Scoping Assessment

Report to Cogency for Eku Energy

2 April 2025



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Armidale Local Government Area

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Cover :Wongalea Abattoir heritage site in 2010 Photo: Pam Watson

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1 Introduction

1.1 Scope

Baker Archaeology was engaged by Eku Energy to provide a preliminary assessment of Aboriginal and historical heritage issues to be considered in planning for the Wongalea Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). This report identifies issues and recommends further steps to assess how best to avoid or manage interactions with Aboriginal and historical heritage sites. Further assessment is proposed as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) investigations.

1.2 Study area

The Wongalea BESS is located at 475 Grafton Road, Armidale in rural country approximately three kilometres east of the Armidale City outskirts (Figure 1). The proposed Wongalea BESS footprint is on the northern side of Grafton Road approximately 500 metres north east of the Armidale sub-station.

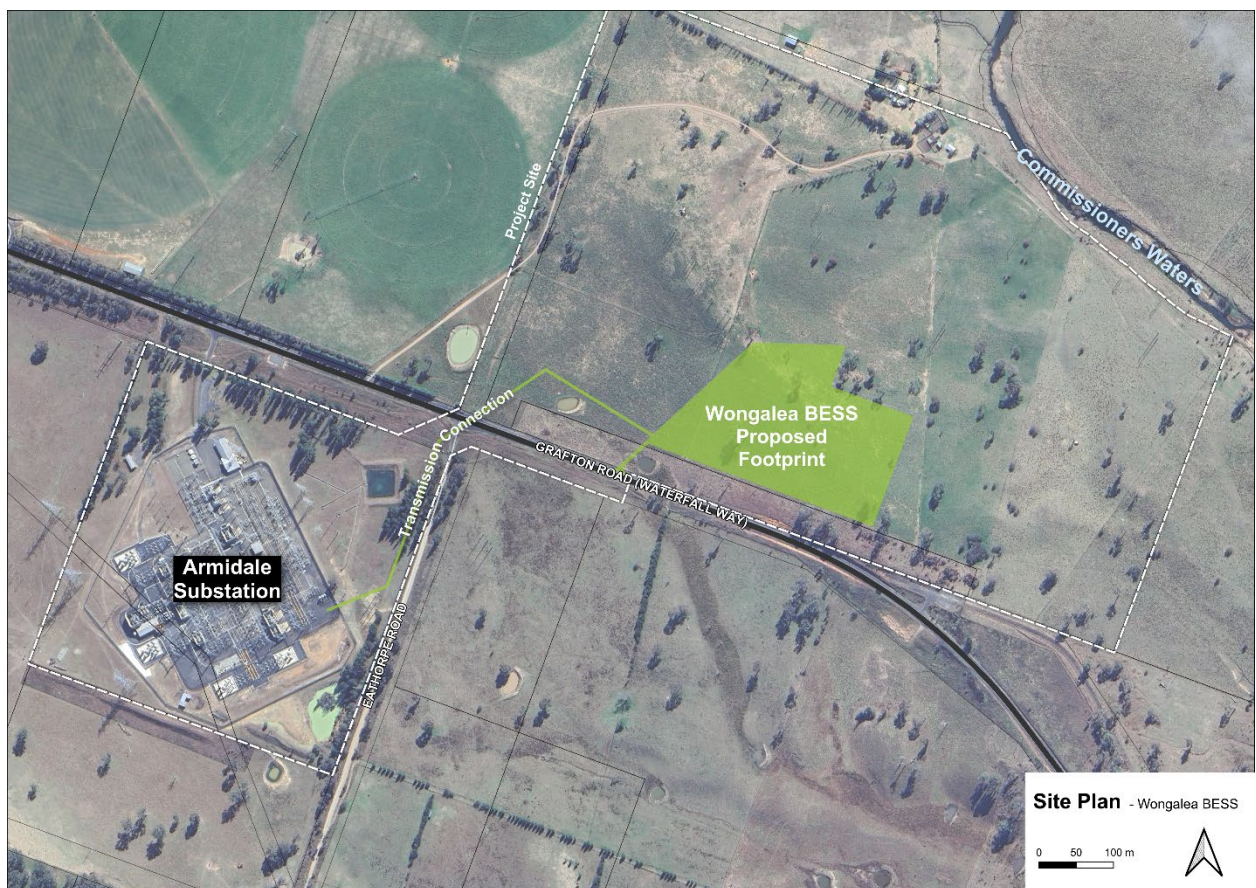


Figure 1. Site plan

The study area comprises all land parcels which include in part some of the proposed development (Figure 2). The study area is approximately 162.5 hectares and extends beyond the immediate impact area. The study area extends along Commissioners Waters for a distance of 2.4 kilometres and includes many parts of the Wongalea property well beyond planned development impact areas.

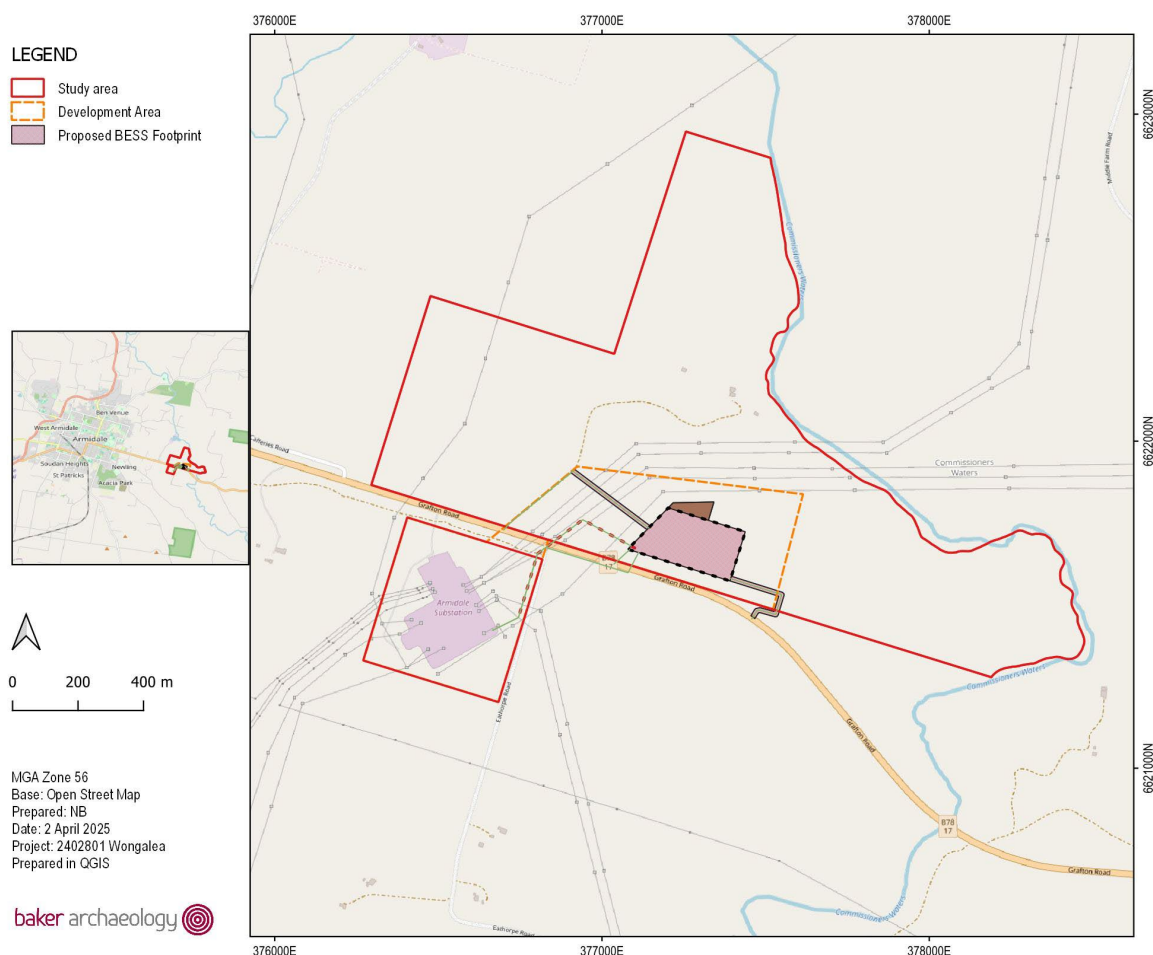


Figure 2. Study area

1.3 Method

This preliminary assessment provides a broad overview of Aboriginal heritage and historical heritage issues which should be addressed further in the EIS. The methods adopted include

- A search of the Aboriginal heritage Information Management System for registered Aboriginal sites in the area surrounding the study area
- A review of Aboriginal site cards for those sites occurring on or close to the study area
- A review of the Heritage NSW State Heritage Inventory for registered historical sites

2 Aboriginal heritage

2.1 Country

The Wongalea BESS is located within Anaiwan¹ Country approximately five kilometres east of the Armidale city-centre.

The Anaiwan-speaking Aboriginal people occupied over 8,000 square kilometres of the New England Tableland, where Armidale is now located. The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia (Horton 1996) identifies neighbours of the Anaiwan as Kamilaroi to the west, Ngarabal to the north, Gumbainggir to the east, Dainggatti to the south east, and Biripi to the south.

The most comprehensive study of New England Tableland Aboriginal archaeology and linguistics was Luke Godwin's PhD thesis in which he argued that,

“a joint ancestry for tableland groups and certain coastal peoples, and that barriers developed between these peoples such that extreme divergence between tableland and the related coastal languages took place. By the time of European settlement, the tableland social organisation, art and exchanges networks had far more in common with people to the west than their coastal brethren. The people of northeastern New South Wales sustained themselves with a sophisticated subsistence round encompassing elements of both foraging and logistical organisation interwoven with a complex mosaic of secular and ceremonial interaction.”²

2.2 Aboriginal sites

Aboriginal sites comprising the locations of observed Aboriginal objects such as flaked stone artefacts have been recorded in the local area. Records of Aboriginal sites have been registered in the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) – a database maintained by Heritage NSW.

A search of the AHIMS database was conducted on 17 January 2025 for an area of three kilometres by three kilometres centred on the study area and Armidale substation. The nine square kilometre search area was sufficient to identify which local Aboriginal site-types were prevalent.

A total of 34 Aboriginal site records were identified within the search area (Figure 3). Twenty eight of the site records are for stone artefact sites, four scarred trees, one quarry and one potential archaeological deposit (PAD – the location where a recorder is of the opinion that Aboriginal objects occur but are not visible).

A review of site cards reveals that three sites close to the study area have erroneous map coordinates and should be registered at least one kilometre further east – according to site descriptions on the cards.

No Aboriginal sites have been recorded within the study area. This reflects the absence of archaeological survey and lack of Aboriginal site recording efforts within the study area. Aboriginal site survey is recommended within the study area for the EIS.

The Commissioners Waters creek forms the northern boundary of the Wongalea property. An area of creek bank and creek-side land up to 200 metres from the creek channel may be archaeologically sensitive according to the standard model of Aboriginal site location set out in current Heritage NSW guidelines.

¹ Tindale 1974. An alternate spelling reported by Matthews (1903) is Anewan. The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia (Horton 1996) adopts the spelling Nganyaywana.

² Godwin 1990 Inside Information: Settlement and Alliance in the late Holocene of Northeastern New South Wales; PhD thesis University of New England: page 1

Clarification of archaeological sensitivity is required through an archaeological survey as part of an Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment report (ACHAR).

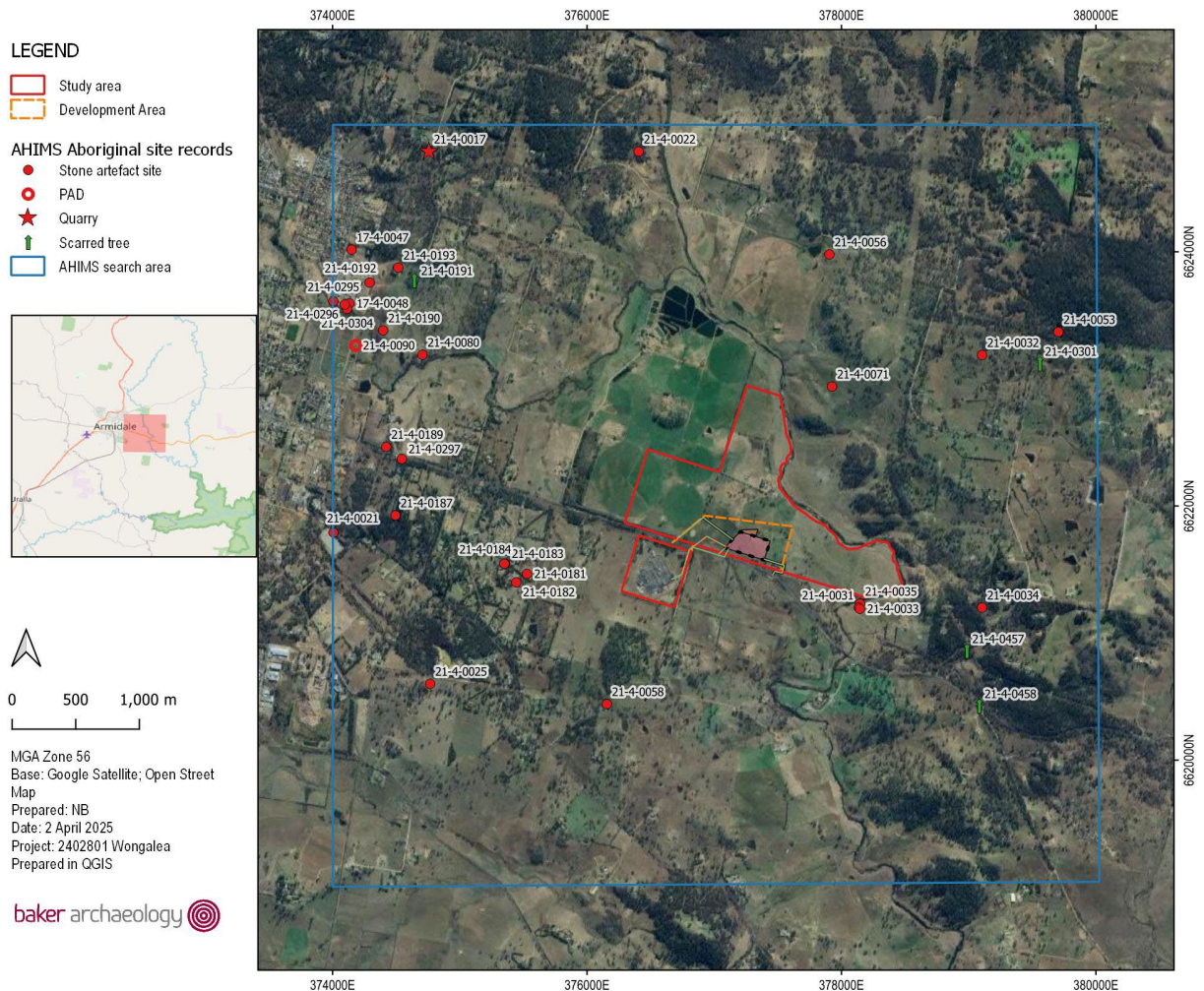


Figure 3. AHIMS Aboriginal site register results

2.3 Recommendation

Despite the lack of registered Aboriginal sites within the land there is a possibility of sites occurring. Aboriginal stone artefact sites are the most likely site type to occur. Preparation of an ACHAR in accordance with Heritage NSW guidelines is recommended for the EIS.

In brief, an ACHAR includes greater depth of research, field investigation and a formal Aboriginal consultation process. The assessment must follow Heritage NSW guidelines including,

OEH 2011 *Guide to investigating, assessing and reporting on Aboriginal cultural heritage in NSW*

DECCW 2010 *Code of Practice for archaeological investigation of Aboriginal objects in New South Wales*

DECCW 2010 *Aboriginal cultural heritage consultation requirements for proponents 2010*

3 Historical heritage

3.1 Location

The study area is located in the rural landscape east of Armidale City. The present-day expansive city manifests 180 years of development since construction of the first post office and courthouse in 1843-44. The study area retains the rural character of sheep and cattle industry that has prospered the city.

3.2 Database search

A search of relevant planning instruments and heritage databases was conducted on 10 February 2025 for the study area and nearby area. One listed historical site occurs within the study area but out side of the development area.

Table 1. Heritage database searches

Database	Result
<i>Australian Heritage database</i> (includes World, National, Commonwealth Heritage lists)	No records
<i>NSW Heritage Inventory</i> (includes State Heritage Register and locally listed items on planning instruments)	Site of Abattoir “Wongalea” – Item A032 in Armidale Regional LEP
Armidale Regional Local Environmental Plan 2012	Site of Abattoir “Wongalea” – Item A032 in Schedule 5 Part 3 Archaeological sites

3.3 Wongalea abattoir

The Wongalea abattoir site was first identified in the Armidale Archaeological Management Plan 2010 prepared by Pam Watson of the Heritage Futures Research Centre University of New England. The study includes an inventory sheet describing the abattoir site as follows.

The building is sited on a hill top, visible to the north from the Grafton Road. The walls survive to roof level although the roof has gone. It has a stubby L-shaped plan, oriented north-south, with a parallel passage wall on the western side. The walls are thick, built of ironstone boulders with smaller stones and mortar infill, edged in blue brick at the quoins and wall ends. The interior walls and floor are thickly plastered with concrete which curves around the corners. A drain runs along the floor to the exterior. Heavy log beams form the roof support and internal uprights against the walls. Planed wooden lintels are set within the walls above the doorways and as support for the cross-beam logs. Heavy metal fittings (bolts and hooks) are set in the beams and walls. A raised square concrete base with corner bolts may be the base for a winch.

The 2010 inventory sheet states that no history is known about the building and that it is of local significance, that it is of unusual construction and impressively crafted. It represents a local small scale industry of meat processing that no longer functions in this way.



Figure 4. Wonglea Abattoir site location



Figure 5. Wonglea abattoir (Pam Watson 2010)

The Wongalea Abattoir structure is visible in a 1955 air photo. In more recent times the site has been subject to near impacts with transmission line poles constructed close-by at 10 metres and 20 metres distance.

The 2010 study identified the site of the Commissioners Waters Inn located just to the east of the study area near the junction of the old Grafton Road alignment and the creek. No standing evidence of the former Inn remains. The site is beyond the impact area for the BESS development.

3.4 Recommendation

The site is located within the study area but outside of the development area and can be readily avoided. Notwithstanding the ease of avoidance, a Statement of Heritage Impact (SOHI) is warranted as part of the EIS for the project.

A SOHI is a documentation of heritage values for a heritage place and how development may (or may not) impact those heritage values. A SOHI must be prepared in accordance with the Heritage NSW guideline, Department of Planning and Environmental 2023 *Guidelines for preparing a statement of heritage impact*.