

Notice of decision

Section 2.22 and clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

Application type	State significant development
Application number and project name	SSD 8895 Wellington North Solar Farm
Applicant	Wellington North Solar Farm Pty Ltd
Consent Authority	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Decision

On 21 April 2021, the Executive Director granted consent to the development application for the Wellington North Solar Farm subject to conditions, under delegation from the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and section 4.38 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (the Act)*.

A copy of the Department of Planning and Environment's Assessment Report, development consent and conditions is available [here](#).

Date of decision

21 April 2021

Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:

- the relevant matters listed in section 4.15 of the Act and the additional matters listed in the statutory context section of the Department's Assessment Report;
- the objects of the Act and the prescribed matters under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000*;
- the considerations under sections 7.14(2) and 7.16(3) of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*;
- all information submitted to the Department during the assessment of the development application and additional information considered in the Department's Assessment Report;
- the findings and recommendations in the Department's Assessment Report;
- the advice from relevant government agencies and Dubbo Regional Council; and
- views of the community about the project (see Attachment 1).

The findings and recommendations set out in the Department's Assessment Report were accepted and adopted as the reasons for making this decision.

The key reasons for granting consent to the development application are as follows:

- the project would provide a range of benefits for the region and the State as a whole, including
 - contributing to the diversification of local industry;
 - a capital investment of \$540 million;
 - creating up to 400 construction jobs;
 - generating enough electricity to power up to 112,200 homes, saving up to 635,700 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year; and
 - assisting in transitioning the electricity sector from coal fired power stations to renewable energy;
- the project is permissible with development consent under *State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007*;
- the project is consistent with relevant NSW Government policies, including the *Climate Change Policy Framework, Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020 – 2030, Large – Scale Solar Energy Guideline* and the *Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2036*;
- the impacts on the community and the environment can be appropriately minimised, managed or offset to an acceptable level, subject to the recommended conditions of consent;
- there are no residual concerns from government agencies and Dubbo Regional Council;
- the issues raised by the community during consultation and in submissions have been considered and adequately addressed through the project and the recommended conditions of consent (see Attachment 1); and
- weighing all relevant considerations, the project is in the public interest, subject to strict conditions of consent.

Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

The Department exhibited the Environmental Impact Statement for the project from 22 August 2018 until 19 September 2018 (29 days) and received 4 public submissions, including 2 objections and 2 in support of the project. The Department visited the site on 21 November 2017 and 9 February 2021.

The key issues raised by the community and considered in the Department's Assessment Report and by the decision maker include land use compatibility, visual impacts, construction traffic impacts and economic impacts. Other issues are addressed in detail in the Department's Assessment Report.

Issue	Consideration
<p><i>Compatibility of the proposed land use</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived incompatibility of the project with the surrounding area. The loss of quality agricultural land for energy production. 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project is located on land zoned RU1 – Primary Production and SP2 – Electricity Supply under the <i>Wellington Local Environment Plan 2012</i>. Under <i>State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007</i> electricity generating works are permissible on any land in a prescribed rural, industrial or special use zone, including RU1. The Department considers that the loss of 815 ha of agricultural land represents a very small fraction of the agricultural output of the region and would result in a negligible impact on its overall productivity. Although the agricultural output of the land would be reduced for the life of the project, the scale and nature of the project has generally low impacts and the land could easily be returned to agricultural uses following decommissioning. The Applicant is also proposing to maintain some agricultural productivity on the site by implementing appropriate land management practices and grazing sheep on the site during operations. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Applicant must maintain the agricultural land capability of the site during operations, including establishing ground cover, appropriate weed management, and undertaking grazing where practicable. Within 18 months of the cessation of operations, the Applicant must rehabilitate the site to the satisfaction of the Secretary, including the removal of all solar farm infrastructure, and restoration of agricultural land capability of the site to its pre-existing use.
<p><i>Visual Impacts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual impact of the project on the local landscape. 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portions of the project would be visible to surrounding residences due to the proximity to the site, undulating terrain and relative absence of vegetation. However, the Department considers that subject to the implementation of visual impact mitigation measures, including vegetation screening, the visual impacts of the project on the landscape and local residents would be acceptable. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and maintain mature vegetation buffers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 m wide along portions of the project's eastern, northern and western boundaries to screen views from the closest residences; and within or directly alongside the transmission line easement adjacent to residences located closer than 200 m from the easement. Prepare a detailed Landscaping Plan for the site in consultation with landowners.
<p><i>Construction Traffic Impacts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road safety issues associated with increased heavy vehicle traffic on local roads. Upgrades to local roads and infrastructure would be required to accommodate project-related traffic. 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project would generate up to 52 heavy vehicle, 132 light vehicle and 80 shuttle bus movements per day, during the peak construction period. The approved over-dimensional and heavy vehicle haulage route would be restricted to the Mitchell Highway and Goolma Road which are designated for use by B-Double vehicles. A small number of heavy vehicles would use Twelve Mile Road to build the transmission line. TfNSW and Council support the transport route, subject to required construction of a new site access point on Goolma Road to which Lightsource bp has agreed to. The transport route is also one of the haulage routes for the proposed Ungula Wind Farm, which is proposing to use Goolma Road and Twelve Mile Road from the Mitchell Highway. Analysis of the cumulative traffic impacts for these projects during peak traffic periods, indicated that the projects combined would add a combined 250 vehicles to total existing traffic volumes on Goolma Road should they be built at the same time. These potential impacts to local road users can be minimised and managed through stringent measures developed as part of the Traffic Management Plan. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to commencing construction, the Applicant must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> construct and maintain a new BAR and AUL treatment at the intersection of the primary site access with Goolma Road; and close the existing access road on Goolma Road. The Applicant must also prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan in consultation with the relevant road authority, including scheduling construction activities and deliveries to minimise conflict with school buses, other road users and construction traffic from other major development projects.

Economic Impacts

- Economic benefits considered to be short term with few ongoing employment opportunities.
- Perception that the project would have a negative impact on adjoining property values.

Assessment

- The project would generate indirect and direct benefits to the local community, including up to 400 jobs during construction and up to 4 jobs during operations. This would include expenditure on local accommodation and businesses;
- Property values are influenced by a number of factors, and the project is permissible with consent, and a detailed assessment of the merits of project found it was unlikely to generate significant environmental, social and economic impacts on the site and surrounds, subject to conditions.

Conditions

- Comply with strict amenity conditions in regard to visual, noise, air quality and traffic impacts to avoid any unacceptable impacts on surrounding residences and other land uses.
- Prior to commencing construction, the Applicant must prepare an Accommodation and Employment Strategy for the project in consultation with Council, and to the satisfaction of the Secretary.