

Department of Planning Housing and Infrastructure
C/- Major Projects Portal

tatsiana.bandaruk@planning.nsw.gov.au

Attention: Ms Tatsiana Bandaruk

New England REZ Network Infrastructure Project – SSI-74175972

Dear Ms Bandaruk

Thank you for your correspondence via the Major Projects Portal of 31 July 2024 and the opportunity to comment on the draft SEARs for the above proposal.

NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (the Department) collaborates with our stakeholders to protect and enhance the productive and sustainable use and resilience of agricultural resources and the environment.

The Department acknowledges that the Project is linked to the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) and has been identified as Critical State Significant Infrastructure. We also note that the Project is for the construction and operation of a new high-voltage electricity network infrastructure that is required to connect renewable energy generation and storage projects within the New England REZ to the existing electricity network to the west of the Singleton adjacent Bayswater Power Station.

The Department understands that the Project will provide new dual 500 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines and associated infrastructure to connect the New England REZ to the National Electricity Market (NEM) to the west of Singleton, and new single 500 kV and 330kV lines to connect to proposed four energy hubs within the New England REZ. We also note that other construction-related works and facilities are required and will include workforce accommodation camps.

We note that the Project corridor has been refined and a Revised Study Corridor (1km wide) was announced in March 2024, the corridor being approximately 350km in length and affecting an estimated 240 landowners. The majority of the corridor comprises RU1 Primary Production agricultural land including Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL), Critical Industry Cluster Equine land and land identified on the preliminary draft State Significant Agricultural Land (SSAL) map. A significant area of the corridor is classified by the Land and Soil Capability Assessment Scheme, Second Approximation (2012) as Class 4 land which is considered in the New England area as high-quality, productive grazing country.

The Scoping Report advises the disturbance area footprint required for the construction and operation of the Project will be confirmed and assessed as part of the EIS, and temporary disturbance areas will be rehabilitated following the completion of construction to a condition similar to pre-disturbance.

The Department acknowledges and supports the additional assessments outlined in the Scoping Report for land use, agriculture, and soils (noted in Attachment A).

Stakeholder concerns regarding biosecurity risks were identified during the consultation and as an important management focus during the construction and operation of the Project. The Social Impact Scoping Report also notes a need for Project activities to implement property-specific biosecurity security measures, identified as essential. Biosecurity considerations have not been included in the draft Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs).

The Department recommends the development of a Biosecurity Management Plan (BMP) for the Project. The BMP should consider all potential biosecurity risks and identify appropriate strategies to prevent, eliminate or minimise those risks. Management issues during and post-construction must be assessed in relation to potential agricultural impacts (pests, weeds, and emergency animal diseases such as Japanese Encephalitis and Foot and Mouth Disease) including a risk assessment outlining the likely plant, animal, and community risks. Biosecurity management must also be addressed at the property level. The origin of any construction materials should be considered before bringing new materials to the site, and whether these can be sourced either on-site or locally.

The Scoping Report notes that workforce accommodation camps will be defined as part of further design development in consultation with the relevant Council and landowners, and assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Department does not support the development of extra dwellings on RU1 Primary Production zoned lands remote from towns or villages due to potential land use conflicts. Benefits to the local community would be enhanced by providing such accommodation in or adjacent to town or village centres with suitable infrastructure and utilities. Any subdivision below the relevant Local Environmental Plan minimum lot size should not result in extra dwelling opportunities.

A Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment (LUCRA) should be undertaken in relation to land management issues during and post-construction, as well as a specific justification for the proposed worker accommodation site(s).

Relevant industry guidelines are provided in Attachment A.

Should you require clarification on any of the information contained in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at landuse.ag@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

Sincerely



Helen Willis

Agricultural Land Use Planning Officer
Soils and Water | Agricultural Land Use Planning
New England and North West Region

13 August 2024

Encl: Attachment A: Further Assessments Relating to Land Use, Agriculture, Soils; Industry Guidelines and Resource Information

Attachment A

Further Assessments Relating to Land Use, Agriculture, Soils

Land use

- an assessment of potential property and land use impacts (including agricultural land, commercial, mining and industrial operations, protected environments and biodiversity offset areas), due to temporary and permanent land requirements for the Project
- assessment of any impacts on agricultural, commercial and industrial productivity due to restrictions or changes in operations because of construction or operational activities, including aerial agriculture
- mitigation measures to avoid, minimise and manage any identified potential impacts of the Project on property, rural communities and land use

Agriculture and Soils

- a review of the existing information on the soil characteristics and land capability in the Preferred Study Corridor, including strategic agricultural lands, erosion potential, acid sulfate soils and salinity
- identification of construction and operation activities that have the potential to damage soil characteristics and/or cause erosion, salinity or acid sulfate soil risks, and mitigation measures
- an assessment of the potential impacts of the Project (during construction and operation) on:
 - agricultural operations, noting the corridor was moved to avoid rural lifestyle development in favour of larger, more remote agricultural holdings
 - BSAL and CIC, with a particular focus on potential impacts on the Upper Hunter Equine CIC
 - land and soil capability that is relative to the New England region
 - travelling stock reserves
- mitigation measures to avoid, minimise and manage any identified potential impacts of the Project on agriculture and soil.

Industry guidelines and resource information

Title	Website link
Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment Guide	https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/lup/development-assessment2/lucra
Infrastructure Proposals on Rural Land	https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/lup/development-assessment2/infrastructure-proposals
The land and soil capability assessment scheme: second approximation 2012 (OEH)	https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/land-and-soil-capability-assessment-scheme
Australian Soil and Land Survey Handbook (CSIRO)	https://ebooks.publish.csiro.au/content/australian-soil-and-land-survey-field-handbook
Guidelines for Surveying Soil and Land Resources (CSIRO)	https://ebooks.publish.csiro.au/content/guidelines-surveying-soil-and-land-resources
Biosecurity Risk Management in Land Use Planning and Development	https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1271241/managing-biosecurity-risks-in-land-use-planning-and-development-guide.pdf