

Ms Lauren Clear  
Department of Planning and Environment  
C/o Major Projects Portal

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**Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements– Muswellbrook Pumped Hydro Energy Storage Project (SSD-65797725)**

Dear Ms Clear

Thank you for your correspondence of 13 December 2023 and the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) for the Muswellbrook Pumped Hydro Energy Storage Project.

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

NSW DPI Agriculture has reviewed the scoping report and the draft SEARs for the above proposal. I understand the proposal is for a Pumped Hydro Energy Storage facility which will provide up to 500 megawatts (MW) of electricity-generating capacity and up to eight hours of energy storage. The project comprises a lower reservoir within the existing Muswellbrook Coal Company Ltd mine void, an upper reservoir at Bells Mountain and associated electricity generation and transmission infrastructure.

The proposed water pipeline which will pipe water from the Hunter River to the facility will traverse land which is mapped as Class 3 land on the Land and Soil Capability Scheme Map. Class 3 land is considered to be high quality agricultural land.

I note the draft SEARs requires consideration of agricultural land and the preparation of a land use conflict risk assessment. This is supported.

It is expected that the consideration of agricultural land would comprise:

- details of the potential impacts of the proposed development on agricultural land and agricultural land uses in the locality.
- possible cumulative impacts on surrounding agricultural enterprises and landholders from other state significant developments (SSDs) in the wider locality.
- assessment of the impacts on agricultural support services, processing and value adding industries.

- measures to avoid or mitigate all significant impacts on agricultural production and agricultural resources.

The LUCRA should detail any potential impacts from the proposed development on neighbouring agricultural land uses and potential impacts of neighbouring agricultural land uses on the operation of the proposed facility. The LUCRA should be informed by consultation with neighbouring landowners to identify potential impacts. For the identified impacts the LUCRA should detail mitigation measures to reduce the potential risk. The consideration of impacts should include those during operation of the facility and not just construction.

NSW DPI Agriculture also requests that the SEARs include a requirement for biosecurity management (pests, weeds, and disease) risk assessment which details the likely plant, animal, and community risks the proposed development may pose to agricultural land uses in the locality. The relevant weed or pest animals for a region are addressed in the regional plans or strategies issued by NSW Local Lands Services. The risk assessment should include details of how the proposal will deal with identified biosecurity risks as well as contingency plans for any failures. It should also include monitoring and mitigation measures for weed and pest management during the operational stage.

Industry guidelines and resource information (**Attachment A**) should also be provided to the proponent for their consideration when preparing the Environmental Impact Statement.

Should you require clarification on any of the information contained in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0429 864 501 or by email at [landuse.ag@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:landuse.ag@dpi.nsw.gov.au) .

Sincerely



Paul Garnett  
Agricultural Land Use Planning Officer  
Ag Soil and Water  
Hunter Region

21 December 2023

Encl: Attachment A: Industry guidelines and resource information

## Attachment A: Industry guidelines and resource information

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