

MAJOR PROJECTS PLANNING.

OBJECTION Submission to the ROMANI BESS 0709676

It is my grave concern that the that the whole REZ renewable energy development plan for southwest NSW is “fundamentally incompatible” **as Agriculture is the predominant economic activity in the region** and across the Hay Plains.

Construction of Wind Turbines, Solar Panel (farms) and BESS complexes do not meet known descriptors of “farming or agriculture”.

farming (noun)

the activity or business of growing crops and raising livestock:

The Project overview in the ROMANI BESS 0709676 complex Environmental Impact Statement states very clearly that Host property and region proposed for the projected Romani BESS complex north of the Boooroorban - Tchelery road is **currently used for agricultural activities and livestock grazing**. The host property is described as having associated agricultural infrastructure including farm buildings, dams and irrigation channels, constructed for the purposes of irrigation and watering livestock, within and outside of the proposed project area, that would be retained. The area identified as the host property is situated within the Coleambally Irrigation Co Operative Limited west Coleambally Management area, and the Coleambally Outfall Drain runs in an East to West direction, located to the South of the Project area. **Predominant land use surrounding project is agricultural and consisting primarily of livestock grazing and has a long history of pastoral activity including beef and sheep grazing, and irrigation cropping such as rice, maize and cotton.**

The cumulative geographical trauma that will be caused in the construction of a BESS project [a Battery Energy Storage System] along with hundreds of wind turbines and a solar (farm) already proposed and determined to be constructed within the vital system of the area known as the Murray River Catchment; a major contributor of the larger Murray Darling Basin, is nothing short of catastrophic environmental vandalism.

Considering that there are several groundwater bores in the vicinity of the project and a huge network of ephemeral creeks and rivulet systems including Cane Grass swamps that are critical to the habitat of native birdlife, particularly the Stubble Quail and other ground dwelling marsupials and reptiles that also rely on shelter and vegetation for food. Other native vegetation such as Emu bush, Long Leaved Eremophila, a distinctive species for the region, alongside Berrigan and Native Plum trees and stands of the resilient and ancient Black Box that have withstood generations of change, bush fires, droughts and minor floods events.

However, nothing can withstand the ravages of heavy machinery and the industry of arterial road building and land clearing that is required for the installation and maintenance of these projects.

Included in the land clearing will be trees, foliage and undergrowth vegetation of hundreds of different species that all play a significant role in the revegetation and restoration efforts in the Booroorban area, contributing to the health and continuing sustainability of the local environment and the topography of the region.

The content and context of the ROMANI BESS Environmental Impact Statement in itself should be ringing ALARM BELLS to the proponents, to the Planning Authority and to the Agricultural industry.

Battery Energy Storage systems:

It is recognised and documented that Battery energy storage developments can and will alter a natural watercourse through the change of natural site topography. The increased water runoff from the Battery modules can and will lead to erosion and sedimentation impacts during the construction phase and over the duration of their lifespan leaving a legacy of permanently altered natural water flows that will not provide water distribution to existing plants and trees. Renewable energy systems are generally touted as clean and sustainable, however, several confirmed cases around the world have revealed the presence of hazardous substances – like asbestos and certain carcinogenic chemicals – in wind turbines, solar farms, and battery energy storage systems (BESS).

Large-scale battery energy storage sites (using lithium-ion batteries) have introduced new hazardous material concerns, especially when fires or accidents occur. Modern Li-ion batteries contain toxic metals and fluorinated compounds, and firefighting efforts can introduce additional carcinogenic chemicals (like PFAS from foam). Several recent high-profile incidents around the world illustrate these risks:

USA – New York (2023): PFAS Foam Contaminates Water After Battery Fire – On May 31, 2023, a fire broke out at a 5 MW lithium-ion BESS facility in East Hampton, NY (operated by an LLC linked to NextEra Energy). Firefighters used water and foam to suppress the blaze. It was later reported that the run-off water, laced with PFAS from firefighting foam (AFFF), “poisoned” the town’s primary drinking water aquifer, which is the sole source of freshwater for East Hampton.

It concerns me that a single event could lead to “irreversible contamination” of land and livestock and while PFAS are known carcinogens and can persist indefinitely in groundwater, very little is known about other carcinogenic properties and contaminants leaching from battery modules. There is worldwide evidence that after battery incidents and subsequent contamination, residents are not immediately warned, and little or no cleanup launched, or further investigation carried out as to the cause and legacy of events. This has prompted public outrage and called for a moratorium on similar battery sites, (New York saw three BESS fires in 2023 – in East Hampton, Warwick, and Lyme – prompted the U.S state of New York Governor Kathy Hochul to convene a Battery Safety

Working Group in late 2023 to investigate and improve safety at BESS facilities statewide.

For local graziers and nearby communities in the Riverina in SW REZ in NSW that share the natural water course and run off from tributary systems in this proposed area it will add further unnecessary stress of having a serious contamination event with a BESS project along with documented environmental harm to our waterways caused from the microplastics, nano plastics and BPAs shedding from turbine blades, making farming within the Riverina untenable for livelihoods and causing unconscionable stress and anxiety to the mental health of our small regional communities.

Impact on local communities and agricultural industry:

The loss of genuine agricultural and farming land in the Riverina and the visual landscape to surrounding towns and travellers will be substantial, permanent and geographically extensive. It will not compensate or be equitable to trade-off wind turbines and BESS complexes with vague proposals of cheaper and cleaner energy against substantial areas of viable agricultural farm and grazing land in the Food Bowl of the Southwest Riverina. I note that it is stated that the project overview this BESS complex would temporarily remove 18 ha of land currently used for small scale cattle grazing, which would be returned to the current level of agricultural productivity following decommissioning. Are you serious?

The average lifespan of these atrocities is twenty plus years, and the cumulative damage to the surrounding areas will be completely unviable for any type of farming activity in the near and far future.

These Gung Ho developments are definitely not in the public interest and despite what the Hay Shire Council touts as the Hay community being in favour and supporting the growth of Renewable Energy developments, I am aware of only a very small percentage of the population (less than .01%) that openly support the industry. These people are The Hay Shire Council employees, the Mayor and 2-3 councillors, potential Land hosts, their neighbours, a handful of hopeful tradesmen and contractors looking for employment (of which I know of NONE at any of the developments) as most of the numbers employed in the REZ industry are FIFO works and workers that are already engaged by the companies to continue their employment at all other existing and potential sites.

There are a small number of local businesses that continue to espouse the dogma, hoping for some huge financial resurgence in the town, but in the main and the majority of the population there is scepticism, doubt, cynicism and growing resentment to those that have against those that have NOT.

The Energy companies (including BESS installation) loudly promote promises of a Brave New World where everything is clean and green with money virtually fluttering from the turbine blades, are at the fault of growing community resentment and division. The ignorance and arrogance surrounding the misinformation regarding agriculture being unaffected and having livestock openly grazing under Turbines, and solar panels, alongside BESS installations is false advertising and reeks of “snake oil salesmen”.

It is a fact that BESS construction works, and ongoing maintenance, repairs and monitoring will destroy wildlife habitats, including some protected and other endangered animals, birdlife including other local vegetation’s purchase of offsetting certificates does not address the large-scale destruction of wildlife in the area in and around the proposed site.

Many local people and other farmers in the district that are not in receipt of the huge sums of money being contracted for hosting these projects have been raising valid concerns over food safety and possible chemical contamination of their land and groundwater that would damage their businesses. Farmers seeking a clean bill of health from Integrity systems are now being asked; “Do livestock have access to leaking electrical transformers, capacitors, hydraulic equipment, solar panels, wind turbines etc. These are justifiable concerns about meat quality arising from “chemical or physical contamination risks that can be caused if livestock have access to degrading equipment”.

Community members are kept in the dark, the contracts and information within the contracts is kept secret, the host landholders encouraged by the Energy sponsors not to reveal information that might cause further rift and division in the community. It is a fallacy that engaging in renewable energy “wind & solar farm” including hosts of BESS projects is drought proofing anyone other than those directly hosting a project and their neighbours. It seems that neighbours receive payment or compensation for noise and skyline pollution, yet the energy providers claim that the turbines, solar farms and BESS projects are CLEAN & GREEN and have little visual impact, less environmental footprint and have no noise or pollution output. Why then, are they compensated for something the Energy provider claim does not exist? These are questions that people living in these communities still want to know.

Current Government is proposing and currently debating legislation that will give the green light to speed up the destruction of our environment and the social fabric of our regional communities by providing the Minister with autocratic powers to ram through renewable energy approvals. This will remove all powers from the community and owners of projected land use for renewable to oppose and object to the rapid expansion of these types of renewable energy projects. For these reasons I am vehemently opposed to any further construction of infrastructure including the installation of a BESS complex in this region.

This legislation will put massive industrial wind, solar and transmission builds ahead of rural people, wildlife, farmland and real environmental care. Foolhardy actions like these are punitive to farmers, agriculture and indifferent to future social and ecological consequences in our regions.

They say the final deal, which retains significant powers for an independent Environment Protection Agency, is close to what Albanese's Left faction had wanted from the outset. If this legislation is successful, it will remove the last recourse for community members and farmers to object to these proposals through the Planning process and our last bastion, The Independent Planning Commission, and ultimately, the jobs and appointments of those that work these departments.

Impact on Road Infrastructure & Local Traffic

Other regional councils throughout Victoria, SA and New England areas of NSW are very vocal with concerns about REZ projects taking up agricultural land, potentially causing groundwater contamination and raising the local fire risk, as well as the impact on local roads and highways. The Hay Shire Council has been very lax in addressing what is seen as primary concerns for ongoing state of disrepair of our local and regional roads. Only very recently they have finally started to consider the massive impact and the toll of increased trucks, construction vehicles, and transport of heavy machinery and industrial components will have on our roads. This has been raised as a level of concern by many other objectors in the Hay area and subsequently ignored.

We continue to see some of the best agricultural land, especially in the New England area and now here in the Southwest of NSW and the Riverina, being overrun by development proposals which are out of [councils'] hands. Although, in some other areas, councils have raised concerns about larger battery projects taking up prime agricultural land, with the developers stating that it is the most affordable way to bring renewable energy to the area.

Unfortunately, we do not have a Council disturbed enough to take a stand against the installation of more Turbine, Solar (farms) and BESS complexes, much to the dismay of myself and other objectors who all have valid and substantial fears and instead they have established themselves as "the poster child of renewable energy done right". As nauseating as the catch phrase is, this mantra is fast being spread and promoted by Re - Alliance, Hay Council employees and other pro activists to ensure as much land as possible in the Riverina and NSW will be encumbered with Renewable Energy developments and the highways and local roads and infrastructure overburdened with increased traffic 24/7.

Heightened traffic of heavy vehicles for the transportation of the components required for the construction of the Romani BESS development will be pushing the capacity of the Cobb Highway. Since the Battery components will be offloaded at the Port of

Geelong, a distance of over 400 kilometres, travelling through a series of small towns and highways to reach the destination. Component deliveries are typically spread over an extended duration and expected to be between 56 heavy and 54 light vehicles to site per day. There are also considerable risks and hazards associated with the transport of oversize vehicles on local and state roads. This also includes visual amenity for small vehicles traveling the same route in areas with limited or no overtaking lanes.

The expense to upgrade and maintain these local roads networks will be substantial, there is no indication anywhere of who is responsible for the financial burden of these works. It is grossly unfair of developers to expect community rate payers and regional taxpayers to carry the burden of local shire and regional road damage caused by independent developers and overseas investors. It is also grossly unfair to expect local traffic, other farm workers, tourists and grey nomads to have to wait long period on sections of road that are under repair or construction and to give way to allow heavy vehicle and oversized transport. This increased traffic will also impact on regular haulage food and supply routes from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney and through all affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) and potential conflicts with local traffic movements.

Other risks and hazards.

The Romani project is situated in an area that has been identified annual as being in a catastrophic risk zone of bushfire. There are substantial risks in rural and remote industries using heavy machinery already and the increase of other foreign components such as turbines, solar panels and BESS complexes not only add to the risk, but they introduce another sphere of hazards for fire fighters and methods of containment. Farmers and machinery operators are warned and monitored to ensure they cease operation of days of high and catastrophic risk. There is no mention in the EIS or the project overview that any of these protected measures will be in place or monitored during the construction and operation of these sites. Of specific concern is the Bushfire Prone Land areas of the Hay Plains consisting of large expanses of grassland and the remoteness of these areas. Additional resources would be required to protect these areas in the event of fire outbreak as there are extended response times and access to adequate resources for fire defence are limited and in some instances non-existent.

In closing I am disappointed and appalled at the casual disregard that some of the Land hosts for these projects, the Local councils, the developers, notwithstanding the citycentric mindset of the supporters that embrace the dogma of “renewable energy” calmly dismiss the effect these projects have on our mental health and our social fabric because we “live in a remote or regional area.” It may be sparsely populated compared to other areas, but it does NOT automatically give licence to the destruction of our farming industries and our countryside. It will not detract from the fierce and determined tenure we will continue to uphold living in these towns and communities.

It should never a measure of compliance “that it’s a desert, or hardly anyone lives there”. Continual loss of this land threatens the livelihood of people in agricultural towns and Australia's long-term ability to feed our growing population and that of other parts of the world.

Australians and Government used to be proud of the emblem, “Made in Australia and manufactured in Australia,” but sadly this is fast diminishing while our agricultural industry and our once revered FOOD BOWLS are being ravaged and denuded.

It poses a significant security risk to our country if we become dependent on others to feed us. This project proposal of the ROMANI BESS will occupy/destroy a considerable footprint of arable land and augment already considerable amount of diminishing agricultural land that could otherwise feed the generations of Australians to come and other people globally.

The loss of our future food production capacity and our world-renowned landscapes and changing skylines from the thickly wooded ranges of the Great Divide to the treeless, sun-baked plains of the Inland that are now spoiled with turbines and infrastructure, is a National and International disgrace.

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