

To: NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Subject Matter: SSD 5915545 - Merino Solar Farm

From: Mitchell Webster

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Compensation Framework – Formal Objection

To whom it may concern,

I submit this objection not only in opposition to **SSD 5915545** (Merino Solar Farm), but to formally challenge the accuracy of the impact assessment and the fairness of the proposed neighbour compensation framework.

This development has already caused significant both *measurable* and *immeasurable* harm to my family and to our future. The impact assessment process has underestimated this harm, and the proposed compensation bears no rational relationship to the losses we are experiencing nor are due to experience in future.

This submission focuses on four key issues:

1. Demonstrated and substantial loss of property value
2. Flawed and biased visual impact assessment
3. Severe lifestyle and intergenerational impacts
4. An unworkable and inequitable compensation process

1. Demonstrated Financial Loss

Independent property valuers have assessed our property value both before and after the submission of this development application. Their conclusion is that, as a direct result of the Merino Solar Farm proposal, the value of our property has fallen from approximately \$2,500,000 to \$1,800,000.

This represents a loss of ~\$700,000 being circa 30 percent of the property value. This is not speculative nor an emotional point of reference; it is professional valuation evidence (acknowledging 2nd hand information - please refer to source for details).

Despite this extraordinary financial impact, the proposed neighbour agreement compensation is minimal and bears no proportional relationship to the loss imposed on us.

A compensation model that offers a fraction of one percent of the proven financial damage cannot reasonably be described as fair, equitable, or adequate.

2. Flawed Visual Impact Assessment

Our property has been categorised as “low impact” under the Visual Impact Assessment. This classification is demonstrably incorrect.

Key concerns include:

- Photographs taken using lenses that distort scale and distance
- Visual modelling that minimises actual visibility from our residence
- Caveats acknowledging distortion while still relying on these images for conclusions
- Assessment undertaken by consultants financially engaged by the proponent

Despite disclaimers, these images materially misrepresent what residents will experience daily. They create a false impression of minimal intrusion when the physical reality is substantial and unavoidable.

This misclassification appears to function primarily as a mechanism to exclude us from meaningful mitigation or compensation. This utterly undermines the integrity of the assessment process and erodes community trust.

3. Lifestyle and Intergenerational Harm

Our family has lived on and *experienced life* on this land for multiple decades. It is not simply an asset - it is our home, our livelihood, and our future.

Growing up on this property shaped who we are. It taught responsibility, connection to land, and long-term stewardship. My brother and I were not observers; we worked the fences, fed stock, maintained dams, and built our lives here which is what built us to be the people we are today.

The proposed development is located approximately 700-750 metres from our residence and even closer to our boundary line (circa 200m). It will permanently alter:

- Our outlook
- Our *perspective*
- Our peace and quiet
- Our ability to use and develop the land
- Our long-term plans for farming, diversification, and future upbringing
- The emotional meaning of our home

This process has already imposed a heavy mental and emotional toll on my parents over the many years of dispute and resistance. What should be a place of security and continuity has become a source of constant stress and conflict.

For me personally, the idea that my **living memory** of my parents will be defined by fighting this development is devastating. That is not something any valuation model can measure,

but it is real and enduring to me personally, and in my opinion **must** be factored in, in some way.

These impacts will last for decades, long after current planners and developers have moved on. At no stage has the **next generation of land custodians** been meaningfully consulted, despite the fact that we will live with these consequences the longest.

This is a serious failure of intergenerational equity.

4. Inadequate and Inequitable Compensation Process

The proposed neighbour agreement requires residents to invoice the developer annually in order to receive compensation. This is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons.

It places the burden on affected residents rather than on the party creating the harm. It introduces friction, complexity, and attrition. Over time, residents will inevitably drop off due to age, illness, fatigue, or administrative burden. The developer understands this and is leveraging it to their advantage.

Compensation should be:

- Automatic
- Indexed
- Enforceable
- Paid without requiring annual claims
- Proportionate to proven financial and lifestyle impacts

A system that requires repeated invoicing is not compensation - it is a deterrent to compensation. This is not good faith negotiation, more so procedural advantage with asymmetric information/experience of such circumstances.

Our Position

We are not opposed to renewable energy in principle. We oppose a system that achieves policy goals by transferring disproportionate harm onto a small number of rural families.

If government wishes to pursue renewable development, it must do so fairly, transparently, with genuine recognition of those who bear the cost, and what that cost **truly** entails.

At present, this project imposes:

- Hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions, in DIRECT financial loss
- Hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions, in INDIRECT losses
- Permanent lifestyle degradation
- Mental and emotional strain
- Intergenerational disadvantage

What I'm Proposing

1. That SSD 5915545 be refused due to unacceptable social, financial, and generational impacts.
2. That the Visual Impact Assessment be independently reviewed using neutral consultants and accurate visual modelling.
3. That compensation be recalculated to reflect both quantitative and qualitative aspects, including but not limited to:
 - Genuine reduction in value (and future further reduction) of property value
 - Long-term lifestyle impacts
 - Duration of the project life
 - Proximity and exposure
4. That any compensation framework be mandatory and automatic, not reliant on annual invoicing by residents.
5. That DPIE undertake a broader review of how neighbour compensation is structured for major renewable infrastructure projects to ensure fairness, proportionality, and intergenerational equity.

We deserve the right to inherit not a burden, but a something that reflects what it would have been without such. A property built through decades of work and care should not become “collateral damage” with “token compensation” to cross their Ts and dot their Is.

This process has already taken far more from us (with a primary cost relating to my parents' mental health and hence lessened lifespan), than has been acknowledged. The current assessment and compensation model does not reflect the reality of what we are losing.

I ask the Department to genuinely consider the full human, financial, and generational cost of this development, and to act accordingly.

Yours sincerely,



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