
Subject: Objection to Merino Solar Farm Proposal

I'm writing to formally object to the proposed Merino Solar Farm.

I grew up on our family farm, which has been in my family for around 80 years. In fact, I specifically remember moving in, living first with our grandparents on the same property, and then the excitement of having our own home, built in part by my Dad. I took for granted the freedom, space, and life lessons that came from growing up on the land. It wasn't until I left home and moved to the city that I truly realised how fortunate we were to have that upbringing. After living in suburbia as a necessity for tertiary education, I now deeply value peace, quiet, and open space in a way I never did as a child.

My son is now able to experience the same things when he visits his grandparents on the farm, and it means everything to me. He loves helping with farm jobs, going for walks, and checking the animals. He gets excited spotting birds like pelicans, swans, shelducks, ibis, purple swamp hens, grass parrots, wrens, finches, magpies, galahs — and so many others. He's learning about nature, responsibility, and the circle of life in a way that only a real working farm and rural environment can teach. We have fruit trees planted which were gifted to him by his great-grandmother, who I lived with as a child. In a very real sense, we have roots here. The farm has provided a stable constant in my son's life, and a refuge for myself. You see, I was a victim of family violence, and for a few years my own home did not feel safe. I had to leave the relationship, and my son and I had to move. In the space of his young life, he has had to move as many times as he has aged in years. As I am sure you can understand, being able to bring your child somewhere that is unequivocally "home" is very grounding for him, reinforcing a positive sense of self and identity. For us, this place is the farm.

My son loves helping his uncle on the tractor, being part of daily farm life, and feeling connected to the land and the people who care for it. Just as I remember doing the same with my parents and grandparents, these skills and life lessons are passed on, person to person. These are experiences you simply can't recreate somewhere else. Goulburn is a lovely regional town. I don't live here anymore, but I do come to visit regularly. These visits are so important to me, and my son regularly asks me when he can go and visit his grandparents and uncle at the farm. I dream of one day moving back home and building our own property there, close by to my parents, and sharing the same intergenerational connection to the land. The area where the proposed Merino Solar Farm is located is a rural lifestyle area, made up largely of small acreage and family properties. I am confident from what I have seen and discussed with neighbours that many others feel as lovingly about their blocks of land as we do, and are equally horrified at EDP's dismissive attitude towards the affected landowners. Goulburn is ideally placed as a regional town centre between Canberra and Sydney, and I am confident that the area will continue to grow as families search for a bit more space to call their own. Do we really want to curtail this growth as a community with an enormous solar factory that doesn't even supply energy to our town? Sounds like a whole lot of future problems for our community to me.

To be clear, I am deeply worried about the added stress this project is placing on my parents and their neighbours. They are now facing the prospect of damaging construction noise, dust, toxic fire risk from large-scale battery storage (BESS), possible contamination of

waterways, and the devaluation of their properties, just to name a few things. I have been supporting my Mum, Dad and brother through this process and have seen the emotional and mental toll this has taken on each of them. I have suffered and so has my son, because our family members are so rarely able to come and visit us. As a parent with chronic illness, I would really benefit from the help my parents have been able to supply in the past. Instead, I have missed out on the support I need because of stress-induced mental illness this proposed project has placed on my family for several years already.

As climate change continues to negatively impact our world, we need to make smart decisions that are future-focused. I firmly believe that solar can be part of that solution - but SENSIBLE placement close to the source is essential. Mum and Dad have solar panels on their own roof for this very reason. Just weeks ago, I was shocked when my Mum sent me photos of the recent hail damage to the solar panels, as well as other plant/vegetation, vehicles and structures. The hailstones were reportedly ranging from golf to cricket-ball sized. This was in addition to yet another hailstorm only a week or so prior, when my son and I were present. I have experienced many hailstorms at the farm over the years, as Goulburn is notorious (even interstate) as a cloudy, windy, often inclement kind of place, alternating with hot and dry in bushfire season. Unfortunately, this hailstorm was much bigger than the other, and caused significant damage. There is a creek running through the farm, as well as several dams, and this area is known to flood. My concern is that hail damage or other extreme weather events due to climate change will contaminate downstream via run-off, as well as the terrifying fire risk and accompanying pollutants of BESS. Worryingly, the SEARS asked for a site water balance and complete impact assessment at the EIS stage, which has not been done. The EIS instead states that a Water Cycle Management Study is still “progressing”, and that the site water balance has not been provided because it will be done with the WCMS. In other words, this is not compliant as lodged, thereby restricting public scrutiny and our ability to analyse the very real risks this proposes to our water health.

I am scared of the legacy this project will leave for my son and any future children I have, because we will be the ones dealing with the debris from broken and aged panels, not EDP. I worry about the livestock and the native animals who will be negatively impacted by this project. Especially concerning is EDP’s woefully inadequate proposal for fire mitigation and handling, in an area that is known for quick-spreading grass fires that change direction in an instant. At the recent council meeting, the EDP representative said that there were adequate provisions in the EIS, which according to him, has been discussed with relevant residents. This is blatantly untrue, and continues a pattern of gaslighting by this large, international corporation. Consultation with affected residents regarding this issue has not been done. Regarding bushfire and BESS safety, the mitigation provided in the EIS is inadequate. Particularly concerning is their report in the EIS that there is no significant offsite risk, and that BESS hazardous events were “low/medium” impact and “very unlikely”. Clearly, the EIS has not taken into account the frequent bushfires which are known to affect this area. These bushfires will only get worse, so to have my parents’ risk labelled as non-existent is insulting, and the rating of “very unlikely” is blatantly untrue. Clearly, this large international company just doesn't care for the expertise and lived experience of Rural Fire Service volunteers, including my brother, who tell me that the site would be so dangerous that no-one would dare go in.

It is very difficult to have any faith in EDP and Merino Solar Farm when their behaviour so far has been insincere, deceitful and purposefully misleading. Initially, the panels were planned to be approximately 500m from my parents' home, and without consultation, the size of the project was increased and the distance became only 150m from our home. The panels will be seen from every part of the property, and from every room in the house. And yet, EDP decided that this is "low impact", because that suits their needs. Furthermore, the EIS does not meet the SEARS in several ways. The scope of the project proposed in the EIS (450 MW / 1800 MWh (AC) BESS) is larger than the capacity defined in the SEARS (a battery "up to 300MW / 1200 MWh"). There is no explanation provided in the EIS and no amended SEARS to represent the changes. It gives me nightmares at night worrying about the risk posed to my family, as well as the continued negative mental health effects this is having on them overall. This risk is only going to increase with climate change, which notably disproportionately affects lower-income communities. I am further afraid that this will set a precedent in regional areas, and other huge internationally owned and funded corporations will move in and bully others like us. I strongly oppose the idea that a foreign-owned company can simply walk in, build an industrial development into a rural residential area, make enormous guaranteed profit from it, then sell it on and walk away. From what I understand, there are no strong legal requirements or conditions for long-term remediation, unlike in mining. Why is this acceptable? As stated above, it will be my children's generation who are left to pay the cost of cleaning up these developments when companies move on and abandon responsibility.

The EIS does not comply with the wording of the SEARS regarding their requirement for a draft landscaping plan developed in consultation with affected landowners. The EIS includes no such plan, due to their determination that impacts are "low". Despite this, the SEARS still calls for a draft plan. even if the impact rate is "low". I love my family and worry how they would further cope with such a huge industrial solar factory everywhere they look. We all adore the views as they are, and if you haven't watched a sunset from my parent's backyard, you've missed out. It's like a painting, it's stunning. I've had international friends visit and remark at the beauty of the farm, especially looking at the sunset over the back paddock. Through my Mum's cancer treatment, particularly when she was undergoing chemotherapy, I made sure to ring her and often the only positive thing she spoke about was that from her bed, she could see the animals and the paddocks, and that comforted her. How on earth is the visual impact of this project marked as "low" in the EIS? That's insulting at minimum. This place is our beautiful sanctuary, and has been throughout all the ups and downs of our lives. I've included a picture below of the sunset where the panels are going to be.

The appalling lack of respect shown by the developer and the host landowner is deeply upsetting. Community consultation has been severely lacking, with many of my parents' neighbours only finding out about the project through word of mouth, not proper engagement. That is not genuine consultation — it is disrespectful and dismissive of the people who live here. I was especially disappointed that the representative for EDP, Mishka Talent, identified at the recent Council meeting that from the company's perspective, only 11 landowners are affected. I personally know more than just 11 landowners who are affected. This blatant disregard for the community is surely a sign of more to come. This proposal threatens more than just land — it threatens a way of life, a sense of place, generational connection to the land, community wellbeing, and environmental safety .

I support renewable energy, but not at the expense of established rural communities, family farming landscapes, and residential lifestyle areas. There are more appropriate locations for industrial-scale renewable energy projects that do not destroy communities or create long-term risks for future generations. I'm deeply invested in our future, and this proposal simply risks too much harm to the regional community of Goulburn for an international company's financial gain.

For these reasons, I strongly object to the Merino Solar Farm being approved in this location.

Sincerely,
Olivia C.

