

Blind Creek Solar Farm

State Significant Development

Application Number: SSD-13166280

Development type: Electricity Generation - Solar

Local Government Area: Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional

I am writing as an enthusiastic supporter of the Blind Creek Solar Farm proposal, and a landowner in the Mount Fairy area nearby to the proposed development.

I have reviewed the website for this proposal and parts of the EIS.

The vision for this proposal is amazing: an effective combination of renewable electricity production linked with regenerative agriculture production on the same site. My own discussions with the proponents show me how seriously they are working to achieve this combined approach.

The scale of this project will allow it to make a meaningful contribution to building the renewable energy contribution to Australia's electricity grid, up to 350MW. In the context of chaotic aspects of the Australian east coast electricity grid during early 2022, building Australia's renewable energy capacity is essential as fossil fuel generators become obsolete, fall into disrepair, become overly expensive and their owners withdraw from the market.

I note that the concept for the Blind Creek project includes all important battery storage to allow more continuous contribution to the grid.

I write these comments as a private citizen who is deeply concerned about Australia's future environmental circumstances related to decline in environmental conditions and in the context of the catastrophic impacts of anthropogenic climate change. Reducing Australia's climate warming emissions and sequestration of carbon are essential to ensure that Australia contributes effectively to reducing the global challenge of climate change.

My background includes study and work in economics, policy making, regional development, ecology and biodiversity over nearly five decades, including at some of the highest levels. I have worked for government and as a private consultant in the design of collaborative scientific research projects across multiple sectors, including energy and agriculture. I have been captain of the Boro/Mt Fairy rural fire brigade, which is directly mentioned in the EIS, for five years. I am joint founder and executive chair of the Australian Holistic Management Co-operative, that delivers Ecological Outcome Verification and Land to Market in Australia. Through these activities the Co-op plays a central role in developing Australia's regenerative agriculture capacity. I chaired the organising committee for the *Farming Matters 2021* conference, that provided, for the first time, a representative overview of perspectives and approaches to regenerative agriculture. I am accredited with the Savory Institute as a Holistic Management Educator at the level of Field Professional and as an Ecological Outcome Verification Master Verifier. I continue to deliver Holistic Management training courses, and have been employed by NSW TAFE to deliver their Holistic Management Diploma. I continue to deliver Ecological Outcome Verification monitoring events and to train new monitors and verifiers.

I congratulate the proponents of this project for taking a holistic approach that includes renewable electricity production and regeneration of the agricultural land on which the solar farm will be established. If the proposal was to ignore the ecological condition of the site, then its potential contribution to reducing and solving national and international environmental challenges would be severely reduced or even negated. I believe that an effective combined management approach can be achieved on the site where management and protection of the solar farm asset can be achieved at the same time as livestock grazing is used to regenerate the ecosystem processes and biodiversity of the land.

However, further detailed work is needed to ensure both goals are achieved. I find some of the stated requirements in the EIS to be questionable. In particular, from pages 340 and 341, the requirement to keep grass length around the panel infrastructure between 5cm and 10cm may be counterproductive to achieving suitable longevity and diversity of grass species. This requirement is mentioned next to a reference to the RFS *Standards for Asset Protection Zones*. Having reviewed that document, I don't find a specific reference to grass length, but instead the following reference from page 6: *Grass needs to be kept short and, where possible, green*. In my future interactions with the proponents, I will be encouraging them to use the full features of the Holistic Management Framework and Holistic Planned Grazing to achieve a successful combined asset protection and regenerative agriculture result.

I note that the proponents are referencing their commitment to Ecological Outcome Verification for the farm and site of the development. This commitment will ensure that they receive the most robust feedback on the health of biodiversity and ecosystem processes on the site. And I will be working with the proponents to ensure maximum value from this commitment.

I congratulate the proponents on their positive and constructive approach to community consultation and engagement. I have previously been involved in consultation processes for the Jupiter Wind Farm as a state significant development. The contrast between the highly constructive and consultative approach being taken for the Blind Creek Solar Farm and that previous process could not be more stark. In my role as captain of a local RFS brigade I have been invited and participated in a thorough and informative site inspection and briefing. I look forward to working positively with the proponents as their plans progress.

Tony Hill
5 July 2022