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Dear Nicole,

Submission - Middlebrook Solar Farm (SSD-10455)

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to provide comment on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Middlebrook Solar Farm (SSD-10455). We have reviewed the documents for the proposed project and wish to lodge an objection to the application. Whilst we understand the importance of transitioning to sustainable energy, we are strongly opposed to this project at this particular site for the following reasons.

Outside of designated New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)

The proposed site for the Middlebrook Solar farm falls outside the New England REZ. This region was chosen due to the suitability of its natural energy resources and has been carefully considered by the Minister for Energy and his department before being declared and legislated. Other proposed sites such as Middlebrook Solar Farm in the Loomberah region has not been subject to such critical analysis. We are concerned that developments like this one, proposed outside REZs, will be subject to less stringent requirements and therefore do harm to their immediate communities without providing a corresponding benefit.

In the instance of the Middlebrook Solar Farm, the proposed location is surrounded by valuable and productive farming properties. Erecting the solar farm on sloping land amid relatively small landholdings will render it highly visible to several neighbours. The existing road network is also insufficient to support the increase in traffic resulting from industrial construction of this nature. As a result of these factors, it is not a suitable location for an industrial solar farm.

Visual Amenity

I do not agree with the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) that the visual quality of the Middlebrook Road/Marsden Park area is low. The valley is incredibly scenic and is not only enjoyed by the local residents but also by the wider community who enjoy drives through countryside and can drive this road up to Nundle. I understand from the VIA that the panels will be very prominent from the road and from residences up and down the valley. That type of industry is not at all in keeping with the rural character of the area or the objectives of the designated zoning by local council.

Prime Agricultural Land

The entire study area is currently utilised for agricultural purposes. I am very concerned about the loss of high-quality primary production land. The study area is full of highly productive farming land that is best suited to both cropping activities and livestock grazing. In the interest of protecting highly productive agricultural land and safeguarding the food security of this nation, locations such as

Loomberah and the particular study area are an inappropriate place for an industrial development of this nature.

Whilst the project plans to allow for the use of the land for sheep grazing we see a number of issues with this proposal.

1. The project will be removing valuable agricultural land and production activities from the local economy. Whilst there is the intention to still be able to use the land for sheep grazing, this is not the most economical and efficient use of this agricultural land which includes 530ha of cropping land. In this way the project will be taking away from the food production industry within the region and country and redistributing profits from primary producers to foreign owned companies.
2. The implementation of panels will make weed prevention on this land extremely difficult, also impacting on neighbouring properties when these weeds spread.
3. The proposal to allow the land to be used for sheep grazing means the panels will have a further impact on visual amenity to the community as the panels will have to be raised to a certain height to allow for grazing underneath and for vegetation growth.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss our submission further.

Yours sincerely,

Eliza & Jack McIver