

18/9/23

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MUSCLE CREEK NSW 2333

MUSWELLBROOK SOLAR FARM – APPLICATION NO SSD-46543209

We wish to lodge our formal objection to the proposed Solar Farm at Muscle Creek.

We are locally born and bred residents of Muswellbrook, with family in Muswellbrook for generations contributing to the building of this town. We were one of the first residents to build our home in the Woodland Ridge Estate and have lived in this beautiful rural residential location for the past 19 years, raising 4 children in this neighborhood. It is a prestigious area and a tightly held community. An idyllic location that is sought after with properties rarely changing hands. Residents of this area take pride in their homes and therefore have established Woodland Ridge as a premium location to live and raise their families.

The location of the proposed Muswellbrook Solar Farm will affect the 70+ houses in our community, not to mention the further development of future homesites that have already started to be constructed. The value of our properties will undoubtedly fall if this proposal is to be approved. As we already stated, this area is very sought after for its idyllic rural residential lifestyle.

Idemitsu Australia, as the owners of the land for the proposed development, have recently closed their coal mine on this site. They are simply looking for a financial benefit for the land and with the decision by the NSW Government to establish the development of Renewable Energy Zones in NSW and the Hunter Central Coast region, they have eagerly proposed the idea of “clean energy” and jumped in with this proposed solar farm, along with other renewable energy ideas for this site, without considering the fact it is located so close to already established residential homes. Idemitsu has been in consultation with the NSW Government since early 2021

This is definitely the direction the government is taking due to the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. We can see there is a RUSH to develop these clean energy projects, but as seen with previous projects that have been rushed, mistakes have been made. Examples of which include the insulation debacle. We do not want to be a casualty of this rush.

We do not object to this clean energy ideal, we just object to the location.

ESCO describes the site as a former coal mine. This is not entirely correct. This land, where they propose to put the solar farm, is a buffer zone to the mine. So, they are essentially building a solar farm without a buffer zone to the rest of the community. The part that has been mined is NOT being used in this development at all. This is the residual land the mine was required to have for buffering the community. No such buffer exists for this new development.

The intrusion of 300 000 solar panels will be immense in the proposed location as well as the electrical infrastructure components generally expected to be between five to 10 metres tall. Our concerns are as follows:-

Community Consultation

The Scoping Report references community consultation.

From our experience the first consultation was receiving the Dept of Planning letter, dated 17 August 2023, informing us of the exhibition period, giving us 1 month to submit a response.

The community consultation they speak of is a phone call to 4 residents to gauge the community response, and the 4 people indicated a positive response. How does calling 4 residents constitute community consultation? I can say that the overall community response in Woodland Ridge is of dissatisfaction, disappointment and resentment to this proposal.

Idemitsu has been in consultation with the NSW Government since early 2021 and Muswellbrook Council since May 2022 and yet the main people impacted by this development are not consulted till August 2023, with commencement expected to commence around Q4 2023.

How is this possible? Is this a rush through government departments as a foregone conclusion to help establish their targets? I hope all our objections are taken seriously.

Visual

The visual impact on the local residential area is immense. The proposed site will be visible not only from our neighbourhood but also from the proposed Muswellbrook By-Pass.

The solar farm is generally located on the flats around Muscle creek. The surrounding houses are on an elevated ridge with views across this flat. Most of the 70+ houses will have some view of the solar panels and electrical substation. The glare for these panels will be very intrusive to these properties.

The Muswellbrook By-Pass has approx. 9600 vehicle movements a day. This information is from the NSW Roads and Maritime report 2005. That number could be much more today. The glare from these panels could impact motorists and cause major or minor crashes. Not to mention a visually displeasing image of Muswellbrook as they drive past.

Wildlife Flora and Fauna

In this proposed location there have been many threatened species identified in the scoping report. Destruction of local habitats and ecosystem will be inevitable. The preliminary assessment found that there is potential for fauna species listed under the BC Act and/or EPBC Act to occur within the study area due to the presence of remnant paddock trees comprising hollows of varying sizes. This includes koalas, forest owls and other various birdlife, reptiles and marsupials. Where will these endangered animals live?

Social

As your report states, Woodland Ridge has a high number of young people living in our area. This suggests that the area is a place that families want to live. By locating the solar farm in this location will prevent expansion of our community and could push people away from this area in source of other locations. This would also negatively impact the economy of Muswellbrook as a roll-on effect.

Economic

The solar farm would have a negative impact on our community economy. The initial construction period is all brought in labour, not new residents. There is already a shortage of housing in the area. This will increase the rental prices for those that genuinely wish to live in Muswellbrook, with only a temporary influx to the economy, but mainly a negative impact. This is not the type of economic growth Muswellbrook needs. It needs permanent residents. Residents that will contribute to the community and invest in our town.

Health

Firstly, the health and well-being of our community should be at the forefront in any proposed development. Right now, the stress on our community is overwhelming with having to fight to stop this development. We can see this firsthand in our community, with the increased talk and stress between residents on how we need to band together.

We have not seen any documentation on the ongoing health risk to living in close proximity to these solar panels. It is only in 30 years' time that real health concerns will be known. ie asbestos, silicosis, pfas, are all examples of us being told they are safe and then they have been found to cause all sorts of health issues. Electromagnetic Radiation can cause headaches and have major concerns for the health of persons with hypersensitivity. This is often why people seek out places to live like Woodland Ridge.

Bushfire

There is only one access road to the proposed site. This is also the only access road to Woodland Ridge. With the increase rise in temperature that is associated with solar farms, there is also an increased risk of Bushfire in the area. When Muscle Creek Road is closed there is no way for anyone to leave this area. This must be addressed!

Contamination

A substation will be constructed within the project area to convert the onsite AC reticulated 33 kV electricity to 132 kV for export to the grid. This will be up to 10 metres high. Substations usually contain one to four power transformers. Power transformers contain oil. The higher voltage oil circuit breakers may have three independent tanks, each containing 400–15,000 l. If these leak, they will leach oil into Muscle creek which flows directly into the Hunter River potentially contaminating ecosystems along the way and drinking water for downstream towns such as Denman. This would be an ecological disaster.

Alternative sites

Liddell Power station has recently closed, and as such, has thousands of hectares of land with proximity to the electricity grid. This available land would be better suited to a solar farm as no-one can see it. There are no neighbours to affect, no neighbours to complain, no land to devalue, no creek to contaminate..... Just a Win Win situation. Have alternative sites been discussed?

Conclusion

Put simply this proposed Solar Farm is in the wrong location. Put it somewhere where it does not border and impact 90 + households. Put it somewhere where the impact on a tightly held and close-knit community will not be impacted. Put it somewhere where there is no potential for leaching into waterways. In our opinion this is the wrong location, and we hope that our concerns and those of our community are taken seriously and we are not discarded in the rush to fulfil an obligation the government has signed up for.

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