

DUNBOGAN MERINO STUD

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Subject: **Objection to proposed Sandy Creek Solar Farm**

Application Number

SSD-41287735

Assessment Type

State Significant Development

Development Type

Electricity Generation – Solar

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to strongly object to the Sandy Creek Solar Farm. My family and I currently operate Dunbogan Merino Stud which is 6400 acres adjacent to the proposed project. We have three children aged 11 (Angus), 7 (Marnie) and 2(Sally). We operate an intensive mixed farming business running 10,000 merino sheep and cropping 1500 acres of cereal and canola crop each year. We employ a full time staff and rely on multiple part time and casual employees as well as a number of contractors.

I am a 4th generation farmer here on the land where our family property boundaries the project site for a distance of 3400 meters. As a resident we will be heavily impacted by this project as well as the other projects intended for this area.

After being involved with a number of submission for various projects already I urge you and you team to consider the impacts this project has on those that live with it. It is quite easy to look at these projects and see that they look like they are within guidelines, but at some stage the people that live with the impacts of these projects need to be considered. I remind you and your team that these guidelines are sufficient if you are not living near these projects and if you are not impacted by them. For those of us that live next to the projects, bring families up next to these projects and have assets next to these projects the guidelines are far from satisfactory. Our landscapes will be transformed from beautiful agricultural land that

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we have cared for for generations to industrial devastation. I can tell you and your team now that the local community do not want this project to be developed.

This project has had major impacts on our business, my family and our lifestyle and continues to take a mental toll on myself and our family. It has engrossed us for the last 3 years and has provided us with nothing but uncertainty for our family and the asset we call our business. It is with sadness that as a family we have made the decision to **leave this great community** if these projects are built. The proposed project brings nothing but negatives to our lives, they alter the beautiful environment that we currently bring our children up in, the environment we have cared for the last 120 years and the environment we operate our businesses in.

The main issues are detailed below. There are photos at the end of the submission detailing the major issues.

1. Cumulative impact of projects in the region:

The EIS of this project and those surrounding it need to be considered in a cumulative way. The impacts of these projects combined will decimate the landscape.

As per outlined in table 2.4 of 2.5.2. This table shows the cumulative projects that are within the REZ zone. Of this the projects "Cobbora Solar Farm 700mW" and "Dapper Solar Farm 300-400mW" and Sandy Creek Solar Farm (700 mW) all neighbour each other. This area entails 1800mW of solar in total. From the current scoping reports we expect there to be approximately 7000 acres of Solar panels in the one area and region. As well as this there is the Spicers Creek Windfarm which also adjoins these projects.

As per page 252 LSBP outlines "It is important to consider the effect of multiple projects on the visual character of the landscape. Multiple projects near each other can result in cumulative visual impacts that affect the way a landscape is experienced. Cumulative visual impacts can arise from the presence of similar projects that may have a low impact individually, but when viewed together can have a significant visual impact on the landscape."

Further cumulative impacts that need to be considered

- Emergency services thru Dunedoo and surrounds. Currently 1 ambulance and 1 police officer in a population of 800 people. It is expected that cumulative there could be 10,000 workers present working on the proposed projects in the area.
- Medical services. Currently 1 doctor present in the local community.

The Cobbora Solar Farm (700mW) is also proposed to be one of the largest solar projects in the country. The Dapper solar farm is proposed to be a 300-400 mW project. In total there is a proposed 1800 mW of solar all adjoining solar projects in the general area.

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2. Visual Impacts

As outlined above the landscape will be drastically changed to industrial land.

As per ES5.16: "Additionally, the visual landscape character of the area will change from predominantly rural agriculture to renewable energy infrastructure."

Discussions with global renewable company UPC (Dunedoo Show 10/02/2022) disclosed that they were invited to look at the properties (as a tender type process) that are now proposed to have Sandy Creek Solar developed on them with the prospect of tendering/ developing a solar farm. The employee (I am happy to share his contact details) outlined to me that the site had major visual issues if a large scale solar development was to be built, and that many of these visual issues could not be addressed using mitigation measures. The company declined to make an offer of option for these reasons.

Our own family home (R15-Dunbogan) as per the EIS will have panels 700 m from our family home in direct line of sight. According to Stephen Archer (State Manager Lightsource BP) there is nothing (BP) they can do to mitigate the impact of these panels. This is contradictory to what is shown in the EIS.

Further moderate visual impacts are seen at the Fairview Cottage (dwelling R14). Again these impacts are only moderate if one is not to live here and be impacted by these sights on a daily basis.

Our adjoining property "Carella" will also be impacted to a lesser extent.

Our own independent assessment of the visual affects of the Sandy Creek Project are shown below. This shows further contradictions as to the visual impacts to our family home to that shown in the EIS.

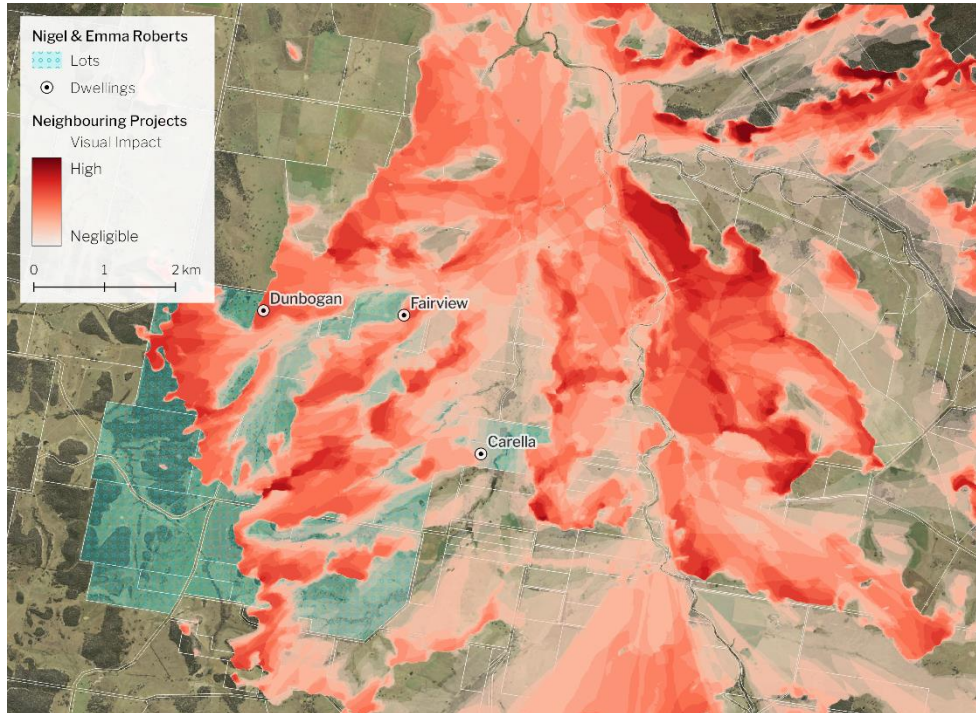
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Figure 1: Indicative visual impact assessment of solar farm showing the high impacts of the proposed project.



The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) in Figure 1 was generated in QGIS using a 5m digital elevation model and assuming typical design parameters for solar farm infrastructure.

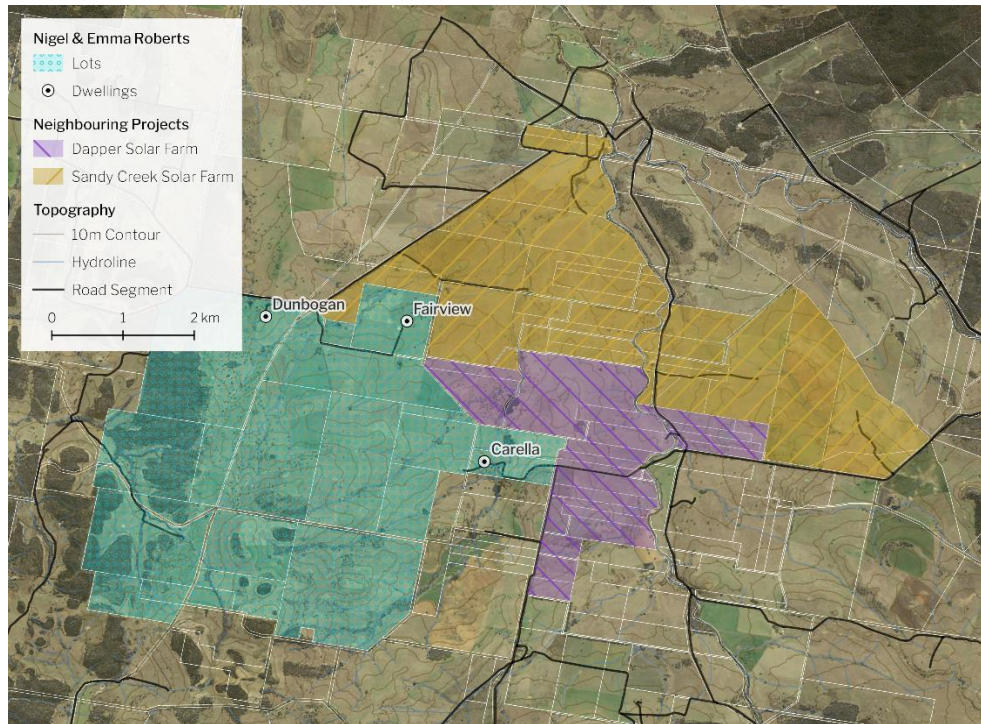
Figure 2: View of our property adjacent to Sandy Creek Solar Farm (marked yellow) (and neighbouring Dapper Solar Farm in purple).

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3. Public Liability Insurance

The issue of Public Liability Insurance continues to be avoided. I took this unanswered issue to Energyco on 28th November 2022. This issue was also taken Lightsource BP to be addressed and still we have no answers.

Our business expects to be surrounded by in excess of \$2.8 billion of solar panels that includes the Sandy Creek project. My insurer has informed me that the maximum level of PL insurance I can obtain is currently \$20 million. If I or an employee here in our business starts a fire and is deemed liable for starting that fire that burns these solar farms down who or where is the difference coming from? We also need to consider the loss of income from the proposed solar farms.

Further to this all businesses surrounding these projects will be heavily affected as contractors will avoid the risk of damages to these projects as they too will only have \$20 million PL cover. Our current business contracts out harvest and hay contracting (both quite fire prone). Who is going to perform these jobs for our business with the added risks associated with the infrastructure losses from these projects? This issue is common to all mixed farming businesses in the area.

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4. Engagement/Consultation for Neighbours

Please find below the full consultation process that we have experienced. The arrogance shown from what is meant to be a global leader in the renewable space is atrocious. As I have outlined to the Project Developer "You have been able to propose to develop a \$1.3 billion solar project (page 234) yet you have failed to address the simple concerns or needs of those that neighbour the project and live with the projects impact". At no stage have we been asked what we would like to see re the development or what can be done to minimise the impacts of the project. Every meeting with LSBP has been merely a box ticking exercise to forfill the "consultation" process.

The "consultation" process is outlined below. These are ALL the correspondence we have had from Lightsource BP

3/11/2021: Initial Consult at our family home With Stephen Archer (SA) (Project Developer/State Manager)

9/12/2021: Email/Letter sent to SA on behalf of the 24 community members outlining a number of concerns that the community wanted addressed

9/12/2021: Reply from SA promising to organise a meeting with ourselves or the community (This meeting never took place and was never organised)

6/3/2022: Follow up email to SA reaching out to have the above concerns addressed.

7/03/2022: Reply from SA encouraging us to a drop in session at various locations

9/03/2022: Attended Dunedoo Drop in session. No concerns addressed other than some bushfire details

20/01/2023: Visual Assessments completed from 3 key areas on the properties

4/10/2023: Email to SA re neighbours/shared benefits

24/04/2024: SA sent visual montages from viewpoints. We find out that panels are intended to be developed 700 m in front of our home in our view

7/5/2024: SA consult on farm. Talk of neighbour agreements/ Shared benefits

29/05/2024: EIS released

7/06/2024: Email to SA re further concerns including panels 700 m from our home. No reply as yet

11/06/2024: Reading EIS and found out of the proposed 350 personnel workers camp that is to be built within the project.

I am happy to share all emails as detailed above. At no stage have we been "consulted" as to what we as those that are impacted want or need. At no stage have we been kept up to date as to the progress of the project. The majority of contact has been from us and the community to BPL asking questions. As of today (11/06/2024) we are still yet to have the initial concerns from the 9/12/2021 addressed.

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If this is how a global renewable developer consults with a neighbour that is going to be heavily impacted by a proposed project then this is atrocious. The arrogance of LSBP to not address community and personal issues and fail to convey any consultation is appalling. It is my business that is affected by this project, it is my family that is affected by this project and it is our asset that is devalued by this project yet they cannot even have a fair level of consultation and address the needs of its neighbours. It is time to put a stop to the box ticking consultation required in the guidelines. Approving this project only increases the arrogance and complacency of Lightsource BP and the consultation process that it lacks.

5. Proposed Temporary Workforce and Water Requirements

Due to nil consultation and nil engagement the first I heard of a workers camp was on the 11/06/2024 as I read the EIS statement. There are a number of concerns with the camp mainly around the water requirements. As per ES5.9 150 ML of water is required per year in the worst case scenario to be sourced from “multi ground water bores”. It would be presumed that the other projects in the area will require water also from similar sources. What are the requirements of the 4 other projects in the area? Again a cumulative impact study is required to determine the requirements of other projects and if the aquifer is capable of these levels of extraction.

Our business at present depends on two bores and an extensive water system that water the 8000-11,000 head of livestock that are run in our business at any time. Are there assurances that the withdrawal of this water from the same aquifer will not affect water supply in our business? If the withdrawal of this water from the groundwater system does affect our livelihood and the wellbeing of our sheep, is Lightsource BP going to truck in water to ensure that sheep daily water requirements are met? This is a concern for all businesses in the area.

6. Loss of Agricultural Land

As per ES5.5 the EIS states “If fully removed from agricultural land use, the study area would account for 0.27% and 0.19% of the agricultural land in the Dubbo and Warrumbungle LGAs being removed, respectively, which is insignificant”

These figures are not a true representation as to what is really occurring. What is insignificant? This area of land is suitable for high intensity sheep and cattle production as well as high production cropping enterprises. At times our intensive pasture systems are capable of sustaining 100DSE/ha. The area that is to be removed is amongst some of the best soil and production areas in the respective LGA s. It is false and irresponsible to compare this calibre of country to that of those in the same LGA and presume they are all of the same productivity. These soils here may be treble the production capacity of other soils in the LGA. An example of this is table 6.21 indicating indicative cropping yields from the area that were

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obtained via discussions with the landowners. These yields are well above that seen across the LGA's.

As per page 239 the project aims to have an operational stocking rate of "75% of the current operations". The project area at present contains predominantly intensive pastures such as Lucerne and tropical grasses and grows a variety of intensive dual purpose crops such as Canola, wheat, barley and oats used for grazing and grain production. Under the proposed developments these intensive pasture and crops will cease. How is it expected that the area will continue at 75% of this. A native grass system will encroach the entire development area.

As per NSW DPI agnote "Using DSE and Carrying Capacity to compare sheep enterprises" ([Using DSEs and carrying capacities to compare sheep enterprises \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/using-dse-and-carrying-capacities-to-compare-sheep-enterprises)) the carrying capacity (Northern Plains) of intensive Lucerne is 7 DSE/ha whilst that of native grasses is 0.3-2 DSE/ha. You would expect that given that fertilisation of grazing land is not possible under the panels that the carrying capacity of native grasses for sheep would further be reduced over time. As per page 154 the landowner states that the carrying capacity of native grasses is 2DSE/ha and under dual purpose crop is at 16DSE/ha. How will the 75% of current carrying capacity be reached with no crop, no fertiliser or intensive pasture production?

Table 6.2 shows the current agricultural land use. The projections to run 75% of the current capacity are **not possible** when the project is all natural pasture. At present the proposed area runs 5550 DSE approx (450 trade steers and 75 cows and calves). At 75% (4162 DSE) of this you would need 2081ha at 2 DSE on natural pastures. There is not the required area in the project area for this to be capable. These are more false claims from LSBP as the proposed claims of 75% continued carrying capacity are not even possible to begin with.

As a qualified agronomist I would expect that carrying capacity under panels would be somewhere in the range of 10-20% of existing carrying capacity when conditions are favourable. These projections would decrease as time goes by and as more nutrition is removed from the soil.

As per 6.6.3 "Lands where solar arrays and other permanent infrastructure such as the substation, electrical collection systems, switchyard, control room or management hub and roads are proposed will not be able to be used for cropping or cattle grazing once constructed."

There is limited scope for further agricultural usage once the proposed project is built.

As per 6.6.3 Agricultural productivity impacts "The study area has an estimated \$386,060–\$527,638 in annual productivity based on calculated agricultural values for the relevant LGAs

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and NRM region and estimated maximum and mean local productivity values of \$2,098,624 and \$1,427,216 respectively”

As outlined above it would be naïve to assume average productivity across the LGA given the highly productive soils of the proposed project site. There are some very marginal and unproductive soils across the LGA. It is on these soils where solar production is suited.

Of consideration is how many farming families will not be in the local community as a result of this project? How many children will not be at our local schools? How many less volunteers will be in the community? How much money will be lost from Agriculture and the associated practices from this area?

7. Increased Labour shortages for Local Business and Increased Wages Locally

At present one of the biggest challenges to our business and those in the area is the supply of affordable labour. As per ES5.12 “Local employment is particularly important as it could provide employment for vulnerable groups including youth, women, and First Nations.” With regard to this statement there are very limited available employees in Dunedoo and in the surrounds of the project. The majority of people in the community are employed within the agricultural space or the affiliated businesses that already support agriculture.

What will the proposed project do to the average wage in the general area? It will most certainly drive the average salary up and in many cases make affordable labour extremely hard to find. This will in turn compromise businesses profitability and make labour availability harder within the agricultural industry. This will affect the availability and affordability of labour within a large area of the project and across various industries.

8. **Landowners:** In table 2.2 of 2.5 The table fails to inform readers that the landowners are both absentee farmers that will not live in the proposed projects area nor live with the impacts of the project. It must be noted that the owners of land on the neighbouring Cobbora Solar are also absentee farmers. The Dapper solar farm is owned by Origin Energy and was purchased in 2021 at auction. A number of farming families attempted to purchase this property including ourselves. With renewable companies purchasing properties in the area it has made expanding an agricultural business here impossible.

9. Social Impacts

By far one of the biggest social issue if the project was to proceed is that families will leave the community. As already outlined our family intend on leaving the area if the project is to proceed. As well as ourselves we are aware of several families that intend on leaving the area if the proposed developments are to proceed. As well as this there are a number of long term rentals in the area that will leave given the changes. I am yet to see a social impacts study that touches on families leaving the community!

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Further social issues include

- the division and conflict within a small community.
- Housing
- Access to medical facilities
- Roads and infrastructure
- Increases in Crime and prevention as result of increased population

“ES6 it will generate 10 direct and 30 indirect FTE jobs and will provide ongoing economic benefits for both the local economy and broader region.” These jobs would have been on these properties regardless of the project. From a long term perspective there is no generation of long term jobs.

ES5.16 “There is potential for cumulative social benefits primarily due to the construction of multiple renewable energy projects and the influx of out of area workers which will increase the region’s economic activity, provide job opportunities and result in road upgrades.” There are minimal cumulative benefits to the local community. The majority of workers will be FIFO or transported in. They will spend minimal money in the community, and have minimal contribution to the community. Given the hours outlined in the EIS these workers will not contribute to the community.

10. Weeds and Feral Animals

“As per 6.2.4 There will be an increase in weeds and pathogens resulting in degradation of retained native vegetation and habitat.”

At present there are a number of noxious weeds on the proposed site including St Johns Wart (*Hypericum perforatum*), Scotch Thistle (*Onopordum* sp), Blue Heliotrope (*Heliotropium amplexicaule*) and spiny burr grass (*Cenchrus* species). How are these weeds not going to be spread further across the site over the construction period? The entire catchment of the project area runs into Sandy creek and into the Talbragar river. The spread of these weeds into these catchments could have devastating affects on those downstream of the project.

There are large expanses of the proposed area that have heavy infestations of St Johns Wart (*Hypericum perforatum*). How will grazing under the panels with sheep be effective where St Johns Wart is present? Where sheep are left to graze in these areas there will be associated animal health issues that can at time lead to acute poisoning and death (see Weeds DPI: [NSW WeedWise](#)).

“Increase in predatory and pest animal species, resulting in increased predation and competition and a consequent reduction in populations”

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Already we have seen increased feral animals throughout the area as landowners in the area become absentee farmers across the proposed projects. There is approximately 7000 acres of area to go under solar panels from the three projects. The feral animals from these areas will move to neighbouring areas as a result of construction and fencing. Is it fair that neighbouring farmers inherit the feral animals that already inhabit these project areas. Does LSBP have a feral animal plan for pigs, foxes and rabbits across the project area?

11. Bushfire Risk, Mitigation and Flooding

As per 6.12.2 "The study area and development footprint are mapped as Category 1 and Category 2 bushfire prone land; however, no detailed fire history has been recorded for the study area and it is not documented as a fire path"

There has been 3 (1992, 2001 and 2012) major fires in the area over the last 25 years of which 2 have **burnt large areas of the proposed site**. The fire in 1992 was next door to the proposed site on Tallawonga Ln. Two of these fires were started by lightning whilst the third started by farm machinery. If consultation for the project was adequately performed with neighbours and the local community LSBP and EMM would be aware of these fire issues. The proposed site is in a fire prone area.

At present there has been no consultation with Elong Elong Fire Brigade. Elong Elong Fire Brigade is made up of volunteers from the area. I am a member of the Elong fire brigade. Elong Fire brigade are not trained to fight fires in high voltage areas neither do they have the training or equipment available to them to fight fires in the proposed development. Will the volunteers of Elong and Laheys creek fire brigades be happy to fight a fire within the proposed development given the high voltage electricity proposed.

Who does LSBP intend to fight the bushfires in the area if the project is to proceed. Community members such as ourselves intend on leaving the area if the proposed development is to proceed. Are LSBP employees going to be members of our local fire services? The precedence of fires would be expected to increase with a larger workforce and the increased presence of high voltage energy present in the area. Again the cumulative impact of projects in the area will remove large numbers of residents that at present make up the local fire brigades.

The other area of concern is if these panels were to be damaged in a fire and a watershed event was to follow the implications to the Sandy Creek, the Talbragar River and in turn the Macquarie river could be catastrophic to large communities and the associated habitat. If such an event was to occur would heavy metals from the solar panels enter the associated waterways? The toxic nature of panels and in such a large area make this a real risk that

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needs to be considered. As per ES.1.1 “study area is located within the Macquarie-Bogan River Catchment and many watercourses traverse the Project site. Sandy Creek and tributaries of Sandy Creek intersect the development footprint, including Broken Leg Creek, Spring Creek, and minor unnamed watercourses.”

The flood risk for the proposed area is of great concern. Please see attached photos as to the magnitude of floods seen prior. The claims that the proposed site is “Low flood risk” (ES.2) is false.

12. Hail Risk

The proposed site has a high risk of hail. At present we pay the highest form of insurance cover for broadacre cropping in NSW and Australia. Our business has had 3 hail claims for crop losses over the last 12 years due to hail. Has LSBP and the associated insurers looked at the risk of hail in the area?

If a hail event is to occur which is likely, is there associated risks where heavy metals and toxins can move into the waterways as runoff from rain events?

13. Roads and Traffic

How does LSBP ensure that local roads will not be inundated with traffic. Our family and staff regularly travel down Tallawonga rd, Dapper rd and Sweeneys lane daily to essential services such as educating our children. How can we be assured that project traffic will not be using these routes? The cumulative traffic impacts from all 5 projects in the area need to be considered in this area. How can the safety of my family be guaranteed with the huge increases in personnel in the area. Already our roads receive little maintenance attention and are commonly dangerous under the various weather conditions

14. Indigenous Areas

It has long been known to locals that there is an indigenous burial site on the Sandy Creek junction. I was told of this area by my grandfather who grew up here and is no longer with us. There is no note of this area in the EIS. If consultation had occurred to neighbours by LSBP this area of importance would have been already noted.

15. Land, erosion soils and Salinity

As a qualified agronomist and farmer of 20 years I have major concerns as to the suitability of some soils in the project area for the project. As outlined in 6.62 Existing Environment

“erosion potential of soils in the study area is predominantly moderate to high due to the presence of dispersive soils.”

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There are no second chances with erosion events and as outlined in 6.6.3 the potential impacts over the construction period are large and unavoidable.

The soils in the project area whilst been extremely productive do contain fragile areas that are susceptible to degradation as per ES 6.6.1 "overall LSC of the Mitchell Creek soil landscape is mapped as Class 3; however, the provided individual LSC hazards for the soil landscape show the presence of LSC Class 4 hazard for soil structural decline, indicating inconsistency in the application of the LSC scheme in the regional mapping." 53% of the proposed site is LSC class 3 suitable for high intensity sheep, cattle and cropping production. Why are these projects not been built on class 6 soils and above?

As per ES6.6.3 "Offsite discharge of sediment and turbid run-off from on-going erosion from drainage, landform and infrastructure design not cognisant of dispersive subsoils ". This discharge runs into the local Talbragar River and then into the Macquarie River which is a mainstay for many industries in the Central West.

There are already areas across the proposed site (see Photos below) that have exhibit the visual affects of salinity. LSBP has identified this as an area of concern in page 150. Further removal of deep rooted perennial trees as planned in the project will further exacerbate these areas. Why would we remove deep rooted perennial trees from an area already under the affects of salinity. Will LSBP be held accountable if I have areas of saline begin to appear across our soils and asset. Will I be compensated if these areas appear ? These areas will only increase in size and nature if this project is to progress.

16. General Impacts

As per 7.3 of the EIS "Where potential impacts cannot be avoided, LSbp has minimised environmental impacts and/or will implement mitigation measures as summarised in Appendix F. Residual biodiversity impacts will be offset through purchasing credits off the market or by payment through the BCF."

How can biodiversity be destroyed within this project and brought back as an offset for currency. Once this biodiversity is destroyed it is gone forever. The biodiversity along these waterways and across the proposed site has been created over millions of years. No currency will replace that biodiversity.

As per 2.8.1 "LSBP has not entered into any agreements with associated or non-associated landowners in relation to mitigation of Project impacts, as the impacts of the Project are not significant enough to warrant such an agreement."

I strongly disagree with the above comments. These comments are contradictory given the impacts outlined.

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I invite NSW Planning and infrastructure to visit our family property and to see the impacts that this project will have on our family, our business, our land asset and livelihoods. Contact details are below and I look forward to showing you how the project will impact us. As shown above in figure 1 the visual impacts to our family home are high. There are panels 600 m from our family home. Our property shares a boundary with the proposed project for 3400m. The impacts of this project are so high that we intend to leave the area if this project is to proceed. The disdain by LSBP to warrant the above comment with regard to the impacts to our family show the arrogance and ignorance of this company. It shows an EIS paid for by LSBP.

This EIS report is full of contradictions and discrepancies. In the EIS we are told the impacts to us as neighbours are “minimal” whilst in the next paragraph we are been told our “, the visual landscape character of the area will change from predominantly rural agriculture to renewable energy infrastructure”

Further more on page 159 “Potential impacts to adjacent lands could include increased presence of biosecurity issues such as weeds and pests, as well as off-site impacts from erosion and sedimentation. “

It has been clear from the outset the LSBP are only interested in profiteering from this project. There has been NIL Consultation from there employees and questions taken to them 2 years ago go unanswered. In hindsight we are having meaningful consultation with there counterparts with regard to other neighbouring projects. We are in favour of the development of renewable projects however they need to be in the right landscapes. The last 3 years of my families lives have been extremely stressful and overly burdensome. Our mental health continues to deteriorate as we take time away from our families and business to deal with the “Next Project”

How can this EIS report be taken at satisfactory and within the guidelines given that it was authorised and paid for by LSBP.

This project should not proceed.

Kind Regards

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Photo1. Highly productive soils capable of intensive food production (wheat and Lambs) taken on our property. The proposed development site is located in the background.



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Photo 2: Flood event in 2020 at Sandy Creek. This combines with broken leg creek on the proposed development site.



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Photo 3. Flooding in 2020 on broken leg creek. This combines with Sandy creek and a number of smaller waterways before moving into the Talbragar River and the Macquarie River



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Photo 4: This is a photo of the proposed development site showing St Johns Wart (Brown Coloured weed in the foreground) and an area exhibiting severe salinity in the background.



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Photo 5: Shows the encroaching weeds St Johns Wart and Blue heliotrope on the current proposed site and the proximity to our own property boundary.



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DUNBOGAN MERINO STUD

Pictures 6, 7 and 8 Show the capability of the soils **on the proposed site**. These crops and pastures include intensive lucerne wheat and canola. These photos were taken from Tallawonga rd and Dapper rd.



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Photo 9 and 10. The front entrance of our property (facing west and east) where panels are proposed showing our family home in the background a mere 700 m from the site.



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