

Cover Letter

To: NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure.

Objection to the proposed Gara Battery Energy Storage System (SSD-71680710)

I write to formally object to the proposed Gara Battery Energy Storage System.

As a resident of R3, with my parents at R1, we live in close proximity to the development.

Verified measurements confirm our homes are substantially closer to the site than stated in the proponent's submission—we are just R1 526 m and R3 607 m from the Switching Station.

We oppose this project on the grounds that it will:

- Cause severe residential and psycho-social impacts, including 14+ months of heavy construction noise, long-term transformer, battery cooling fan noise and loss of peace, sleep, and wellbeing.
- Place us directly in a fire and toxic smoke line, as prevailing westerly winds would carry lithium-ion fire gases and smoke directly toward our homes.
- Threaten R1's essential water supply: a registered domestic town water easement runs under the project entrance, with 75 heavy vehicle movements per day proposed over it. This issue was raised with ACEnergy repeatedly but ignored in their consultation report.
- Fail to deliver agreed mitigation: Ace initially committed to matching treelanes on common eastern boundary and building a full acoustic wall, but these commitments were abandoned, and put back onto us.
- Misrepresent mitigation by claiming "indicative landscaping" where trees were actually planted by my family over 40 years ago.
- Destroy productive agricultural country, biodiversity, and downstream waterways feeding into the World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests.
- Ace Energy has attempted to shift the burden of mitigation back onto R1 and R3 by expecting us to undertake tree planting and long-term management on our own land. Screening and noise reduction should be delivered entirely on Ace Energy's land, not transferred to residents already bearing the brunt of the impacts. Furthermore, Ace Energy has given no consideration to any form of compensation that duly reflects the scale of disruption and the permanent loss of amenity this proposal will impose on affected households. The compensation offered to date is vastly inadequate, failing to account for the noise, dust, visual industrialisation, fire and safety risks, and the irreversible erosion of peace and rural lifestyle. Adequate compensation must recognise both property value and the profound, ongoing impacts on health, wellbeing, and community life.

As there are already clear discrepancies in ACEnergy's submission, all figures and modelling must be independently verified by the Department to be able to gage the detrimental effects on residences health accurately.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Department to REFUSE the Gara BESS application (SSD-71680710).

Sincerely,

[Daniel Driscoll]

Resident of R3

Residential Amenity Impacts

Construction is forecast to last 60 weeks (14 months), including 4–5 months of intense civil works, and heavy vehicle movements. Works are scheduled from 7:00 am–6:00 pm weekdays and 8:00 am–1:00 pm Saturdays. These will generate noise well above existing rural baselines, with the EIS itself acknowledging exceedances of EPA Interim Construction Noise Guideline thresholds even with barriers.

Operational noise from inverters, transformers, and the switching station will permanently erode amenity of our area. We chose to live here for its tranquility and beauty. This project would replace it with industrial noise and infrastructure dominating the landscape.

Beyond noise, the project undermines privacy and rural identity. Large-scale infrastructure will shift the character of the community from agricultural to industrial. The resulting stress, loss of amenity, and cumulative effects of traffic, light pollution, and constant machinery hum pose serious risks to health, wellbeing, and our community's rural way of life.

Visual/Noise Impacts

The Noise Impact Assessment (Appendix Q) shows that R1 670 and R3 750m east (These distances are closer than Appendix Q states) will have direct line-of-sight to the switching station, overhead lines, and associated towers. Even after landscaping, the upper portions of the switching station, towers remain visible. Security lighting will cause permanent night-time light pollution. Vegetation screening may take 7–12 years to establish but cannot conceal the industrial structures. This represents irreversible industrialisation of the rural landscape. The proposed Gara BESS will create substantial and unacceptable visual impacts for nearby residents. The main BESS compound, including the banks of battery containers, inverters, transformers, and associated infrastructure, will remain largely unscreened, with only a partial acoustic wall proposed. This leaves the majority of the development, particularly the western and southern aspects, in direct line-of-sight from nearby residences. The absence of a full-perimeter acoustic and visual barrier means the industrial scale of the project will dominate the surrounding rural landscape. The proponent's own Visual Impact Assessment acknowledges "high visual sensitivity" for nearby residences and identifies residual "moderate to high" visual impacts, yet these impacts are downplayed in their overall conclusion. Compounding this, the proposed high-voltage transition line to the grid network is to be constructed overhead, introducing a series of tall pylons cutting across the skyline. This new linear intrusion is not only visually stark but is also inconsistent with the landscape character objectives of the RU1 Primary Production zone. The underground option is preferable and would ensure minimum impact. Australian precedent exists for underground connections, such as the Gin Gin BESS in Queensland, which uses a 1.7 km underground 132 kV cable to Powerlink's substation. Undergrounding reduces visual intrusion, protects rural character, and maintains landscape integrity. Ace Energy has continually refused to consider this option. This is unreasonable and inconsistent with best practice.

. These impacts will be further intensified by 24-hour security lighting, in what is otherwise a quiet, low-illumination rural setting.

The proponent's reliance on "indicative landscaping" is misleading, as the mapped vegetation already exists, planted by my family over 40 years ago, and does not represent new mitigation.

Effective screening could only be achieved through the construction of a robust, full-height acoustic wall encircling the entire BESS compound, in combination with substantial new planting on ACE's land. Without such measures, the residual visual impact remains grossly underestimated and wholly unacceptable.

Bushfire, Hazard Risks

As one of the closest residents to this proposal, I can see that ACE's reports fail to meet the standards set out in Armidale Regional Council's planning framework. The Council's Development Control Plan requires developers to identify and properly mitigate hazards and land-use conflicts, yet the proponent has downplayed the off-site risks of bushfire and battery thermal runaway, despite the fact that our homes sit only 500–600 m away. Under Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019, a facility of this scale should demonstrate far greater mitigation plans for neighbours. Instead, the plans show only a short section of wall on the eastern side of the BESS site, leaving all boundaries susceptible to external/internal fire risk. This approach not only conflicts with the LEP's requirement to minimise land-use conflict but also undermines the Local Strategic Planning Statement, which prioritises protecting rural amenities and safety. From our perspective as near residents, it is obvious that the proposal exposes both R1 and R3 to unacceptable bushfire/toxic gas risks and is wholly inconsistent with the planning protections that should safeguard families.

Biodiversity, Koala Impacts

On our properties at R1 and R3 we see koalas, which show they still use this landscape. The proponent's own reports admit the project will clear about 22.4 ha of vegetation, including 13.7 ha of critically endangered White Box–Yellow Box–Blakely's Red Gum Woodland, remove hollow-bearing trees, and affect waterways that flow into the Macleay River and the Gondwana World Heritage Area. The Biodiversity report also acknowledges that this area is mapped as potential core koala habitat under the Armidale Koala Strategy, with records of koalas within 2–3 km and one only 550 m from the BESS site. We have had them in our backyard. We have invested considerable time and money on our property to increase biodiversity and help the local koala population increase, by planting native koala loving tree such as *E.Nicholii* and fencing these areas off. They use the tree lanes and other treed areas as a way of moving through our property and avoiding predation by foxes. Despite this, ACE downplays the risk, relying on offsets and limited surveys rather than genuine avoidance. From my perspective as R3, the result would be serious and irreversible harm to koalas, other native species, and internationally significant ecosystems.

Domestic water Easement

A registered domestic town water easement runs beneath the proposed project entrance and is the only source of treated water supply for my parents at R1. This line is shallow, rural-grade poly pipe and was never designed to withstand the dynamic pressures of constant heavy traffic. The proposal anticipates around 75 heavy vehicle movements per day at peak, plus additional light vehicle traffic. The weight, vibration, and repeated crossings will place extreme stress on the pipeline, with a high risk of rupture or failure.

This is not a hypothetical concern. We have raised this issue with ACE on multiple occasions, yet it is absent from the Stakeholder and Community Engagement of their submission. This omission is serious, as the easement is legally registered and provides essential domestic supply. Failure of this line would cause immediate disruption to water access, with potentially severe consequences for health and amenity. Protection of this pipeline, either through structural reinforcement (such as bridging or concrete slab protection) or relocation at the proponent's cost, is essential if the project were to proceed. The failure to acknowledge this constraint reflects poorly on the adequacy and honesty of the consultation process.

Conclusion

The Gara BESS would cause unacceptable impacts, including:

- Severe residential disruption to all receivers from noise, dust, visual intrusion, R1 water supply risk;
- Industrialisation of the rural landscape, destroying amenity and farmland character.
- Permanent environmental damage, including clearing of critically endangered ecological communities, hollow-bearing trees, and koala habitat;
- Serious water risks, with potential contamination of surface water, groundwater, the Macleay River catchment, and the Gondwana World Heritage Area;
- Unacceptable hazard and bushfire risks, with lithium-ion battery fires, toxic plumes, and insufficient containment directly threatening nearby homes.
- Ace Energy has shifted the burden of mitigation onto R1 and R3 by expecting us to plant and manage screening on our land, when it should occur on theirs. They have also failed to offer compensation that would reflect the scale of disruption, permanent loss of amenity, noise, visual industrialisation, fire and dust. The offers to date are grossly inadequate and have not been initiated formally. No offers have been forthcoming to address the lasting impacts on property value, health, wellbeing, and rural lifestyle.

For these reasons, the Gara BESS is incompatible with its locality and fails to address shortfalls in the proposed development. It should not be approved.