
Objections to proposed Gara Battery Energy Storage System – F Tregoning

Project Application Number: SSD-71680710

Statement to the Application:

As a close resident to the proposed development residing at the location named 'R3' in the documentation, I object to the application.

Reasons for Objection:

1. **The proposed development does not fit with the regional footprint of the outer Armidale / Metz area**, that is primarily for agricultural and residential use. Rather, the development works against the area's aesthetic and primary purposes, creating long-term degradation of valuable residential, rural and tourism environments.

This is noted in the [Armidale Regional Local Environmental Plan 2012](#) (ARLEP), that aims to **protect the region** as a vibrant community of arts, agriculture and natural resources (Section 1.2 Aims of Plan).

The ARLEP notes the objectives of Zone RU1, the primary zoning of the proposed development, are as follows:

Land Use Table

Zone RU1 Primary Production

1. Objectives of zone

- To encourage sustainable primary industry production by maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base.
- To encourage diversity in primary industry enterprises and systems appropriate for the area.
- To minimise the fragmentation and alienation of resource lands.
- To minimise conflict between land uses within this zone and land uses within adjoining zones.
- To allow for non-agricultural land uses that will not restrict the use of other land in the locality for agricultural purposes.

The proposed development directly conflicts between land uses within RU1, as it is not for the purpose of sustainable primary industry production or to encourage diversity in primary industry enterprises and systems appropriate for the area.

The [Referral summary for the project's assessment](#) under Part 4 of the [Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979](#) (EPBC Act), on the EBPC Act Public Portal notes the primary goal of the project is:

- To develop a high-quality utility-scale BESS to support a future of decarbonization.

Further, the Referral summary notes the purpose of the proposed development is to provide support to the National Electricity Market (NEM) and objectives of the NSW Government that seek to address energy affordability, reliability and shortages.

Whilst the proposed development is a State Significant Development (SSD), it appears reasonable to conclude that its purpose does not appropriately align with the objectives of zone RU1 in the ARLEP, (stated above) or the Aims of Plan under Section 1.2.

For example Section 1.2(2)(a) of the ARLEP states:

1.2 Aims of Plan

(2) The particular aims of this Plan are as follows-

- (a) to encourage the orderly management, development and conservation of resources by protecting, enhancing and conserving—
 - (i) land of significance for agricultural production, and
 - (ii) timber, minerals, soils, water and other natural resources, and
 - (iii) areas of high scenic or recreational value, and
 - (iv) native plants and animals, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities, and their habitats, and
 - (v) places and buildings of heritage significance,

The proposed development appears out of step and incongruent with the primary principles of planning in the area.

Further, the cumulative effect of additional proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) developments in the area is of major concern to the region's integrity as a significant agricultural region and centre for arts and tourism.

A series of proposed BESS developments may carry additional risks, including obstructing and degrading visual landscapes, impacting on ecosystems, devaluing property values, and impinging on numerous national parks and reserves in the New England region.

Consideration is suggested for dispersing BESS projects across a broader area in NSW and across Australia more generally.

2. The proposed development is too close to residential properties, particularly neighbouring properties.

The proposed location, as per the aerial map provided in the documentation (Ref. Figure 4 aerial map), appears way too close on the landscape to residential properties nearby. Whilst the proposal may justify the location of the proposed development via the management of potential hazards such as noise, surface water and fire, the visual impact in particular of the proposed site is of major significance to neighbouring properties.

Properties referred to in Figure 4 as R1, R2, R3 (as well as R6, not shown), are located in quiet, peaceful, picturesque valleys that are visually beautiful, and personify ideal rural valley landscapes west of the Great Dividing Range.

Properties at R1 and R3, and likely R2 and R6, attract numerous species of wildlife, including birds, marsupials (that include koalas), reptiles and frogs, that can take sanctuary on these properties during drier times, or to escape various adverse weather conditions.

The proposed location of the large-scale approximately 13.5 hectare storage system, with the total site area of approximately 34.37 hectares as described in the [Referral summary](#), **measure distances of 526m from R1, and 607m from R2** based on the distances provided in Figure 5 of the documentation (refer to the attached map).

These distances are undesirable and too close, and need to be considered within the broader context of long-term impacts on residents and the surrounding environment.

There are also undesirable distances from the proposed development to **R2 and R6**.

Location options further away from R1, R2, R3 and R6 are requested, in a different, more remote location, or further away from residences.

Options are requested that offer solutions that are more sensitive to the needs and preferences of affected residents, and to the surrounding natural environment.

As proposed, both the location and its accompanying infrastructure appear undesirably juxtaposed against neighbouring properties and the landscape.

Overall, the proposed development is way too close to properties and to the picturesque valleys accessed via the Waterfall Way.

3. **The proposed location is next to a significant tourism route for the local region**, being the Waterfall Way, that connects Armidale to the Coffs Coast area. The Pacific Highway then connects on to key tourism destinations such as Byron Bay to the north and Port Macquarie to the south. The Waterfall Way is known for its scenic beauty and showcasing some of New England's best scenery.

Both the proposed construction timeframe of 14 months, and the location of the proposed development along the Waterfall Way, has the potential to detract from positive tourism experiences and to degrade the picturesque scenery along this scenic tourism drive. For example, heavy vehicle usage during construction may upset tourist traffic due to changed traffic conditions and roadworks along the Waterfall Way.

Tourism is a major economic generator for the region, and is a significant sector for future growth. Objective 7 of the [New England North West Regional Plan 2041](#) is to 'Support a diverse visitor economy'.

Page 36 of the plan notes that on average, **3.1 million visitors** come to the New England North West region each year. In 2019 when there were **4 million visitors**, the total **spend in the region was over \$1.1 billion**.

Tourism is also a significant employer for the region, **employing over 5,000 people each year** (ref. Page 36 of the Regional Plan).

Any new development should aim to protect and preserve the area's tourism economy, and minimise impacts for those visiting the region to experience its natural beauty, agricultural heritage, and stunning scenery.

Figure 1: Photo of Point Lookout



Ref: 2025, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 'Point Lookout, New England National Park'. Available at: <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/lookouts/point-lookout>.

The Waterfall Way is the access route to several national parks of national significance, For example:

- New England National Park (access to Point Lookout)
- Oxley Wild Rivers National Park
- Cathedral Rock National Park.

These national parks and their adjoining state forests and reserves also protect some of Australia's most beautiful river systems, for example:

- The Chandler River
- The Macleay River
- The Styx River.

Figure 2: Photo of Chandler River



Ref: 2023, own photo of '*Chandler River in the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park*'.

It is suggested that the development of battery energy storage systems be relocated to areas further away from natural heritage areas.

The long-term benefit of a battery energy storage system away from residential properties, tourism routes and scenic locations, is that the environmental and agricultural footprint of the area is protected and preserved.

This benefits both communities and visitors to the area, and those living along the Waterfall Way and its connecting roads.

4. **The proposed development raises mental health concerns.** It is well known that farmers and rural Australians can be susceptible to mental health concerns, particularly during times of drought, poor weather conditions and fluctuating stock prices.

A poorly located large-scale battery energy storage system, obstructing views and creating potential hazards such as noise and fire, may not support good mental health outcomes.

[Beyond Blue reports in a Media Release on 15 July 2025](#), that in recent years, ‘over 30% of farmers have reported a decline in their mental health’. Reasons are linked to weather events, natural disasters, financial pressure and cost of living pressures.

Mental health concerns raised were listed as anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, grief and adjustment issues, all of which may be compounded by stressors of rural life.

In the Media Release, Zoetis, a partner of Beyond Blue, notes that it has donated more than \$900,000 to help fund mental health support services for those living outside of major cities, with a goal to reach \$1m.

Fred Schwenke, Zoetis Business Unit Director, Livestock notes ‘*the need for a long-term approach to addressing mental health ‘in regional areas’*. [In the Media Release](#), Mr Schwenke quotes:

“Supporting rural Australia on its long journey to better mental health is not a quick fix - it’s a sustained and compassionate effort. We know farmers and rural communities are strong, but they’re not invincible. Improving mental health outcomes requires more than just awareness; it needs consistent, meaningful action and unwavering, long-term support”.

Solutions were provided by way of the [Beyond Blue Support Service](#), connecting farmers with trained and qualified counsellors, providing a safe space to raise their concerns and discuss how stress is affecting them. According to [the Media Release](#) this solution yields a positive impact, with 76% of callers providing feedback that they felt less distressed after making contact.

A battery energy storage system positioned so close to prime rural localities and sheep grazing country is not ideal for supporting good mental health outcomes for farmers and rural occupants.

Long-term, the effect of the large-scale proposed development may significantly erode the mental health of persons, particularly in surrounding properties, and is of major concern.

As a close resident to the proposed development, I feel unsure about options moving forward to preserve mental health. What will I be left with once the project is completed, and how will I feel during the construction period, 3, 4, 5 months in?

There needs to be due consideration given to providing compensation and specialised support for every resident that may be affected by the large-scale storage system.

5. **Finally, there is a list of miscellaneous concerns for the proposed development**, that are listed due to their potential impact and possible solutions to minimise these impacts.
 1. **Noise levels** both during construction and following project completion. People have different sensitivities to noise, and generous buffers should be offered, otherwise the project relocated to a more remote area. It is suggested noise sensitivities are also tested with affected residents.
 2. **Compensation** to affected residents. Due and appropriate long-term compensation for project location and property values should be provided, adequate and independently verified.
 3. **Transmission towers** should be moved to underground cable systems to minimise visual impacts and potential hazards such as electrical damage from cyclones.
 4. **Visual impact is of major concern to neighbouring residents** and raises concerns around noise, disruption and the erosion of mental health during the construction period. There is also ongoing mental health concerns post completion. Independent verification should be sought to comment on the distance of the proposed development to households, and how this compares to international best practice examples.
 5. **Genuine consultation with stakeholders.** The project feels rushed, onerous and difficult to interpret. Those community members most affected should be given preference regarding whether the proposed development is supported or opposed.