

NEW ENGLAND SOLAR FARM SUBMISSION – N6

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We are writing this submission relating to the proposed New England Solar Farm. We have lived at “Goobragandra” since 1977. Our property (N6) is adjoining the planned Northern Array, one paddock removed and within sight of the P.V. panels.

While we essentially support the production of electricity by renewable means, we agree wholeheartedly with the UPC Renewables policy that, “the footprint needs to be as small as possible, especially in relation to those residents who stand to be the most adversely affected”.

It is in this context that we alert you to the following concerns that we have.

1. Visual amenity.

We built our house and moved to this location forty two years ago. It is here that we raised our family to enjoy pastoral vistas, space and quiet. Though we must reluctantly forgo the use of open space, which will be confined by security fencing around the Northern Array, we are not prepared to lose our views of the hills and surrounds, by having these replaced by P.V. cell arrays.

We earnestly request New England Solar to locate arrays with due respect for the visual impact on residents. In our case move the array at least 100m further west.

2. Noise, Dust, Light and Vibration Pollution

We are concerned that the quality of our lifestyle at “Goobragandra” will be compromised by these factors, especially in the peak construction years. Our prevailing winds are Westerly, commonly S.W. This weather factor will serve to enhance noise and dust aggravation for us. It is especially concerning as my wife is a mild asthmatic.

Some of these concerns could be somewhat mitigated if the company designed the arrays and major access routes as far away from the residents as is possible. The workers village also needs to be as far removed as possible from our residential area and lit at night by suitable softer lighting – other than mercury or bright white LED sources.

Sympathetic tree planting would also help to reduce the effect of these intrusive factors.

3. Closing the Gap – Tree Planting Project

The solar company executives have been made aware that a Government funded and supported project entitled “Closing the Gap” has been functioning for several years and is ongoing. It involves strategic, planned and partially government funded tree and shrub plantings. The purpose of “Closing the Gap” is to better enable the movement/migration of birds across the 22km gap of open, cleared paddocks, extending from the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park in the East, to the Invergowrie areas in the west. This will provide access for native fauna, predominantly birds, from the Eastern regions, to Southern Queensland and vice versa. Some of the targeted bird species are migratory through these zones. Many species are becoming rarer and some are classified as endangered. Scattered mature trees are highly significant to remnant bird populations and need to be located and preserved. (Existing significant, mature trees in the Northern Array are NOT all located on the maps provided.) “Offsets will not effectively replace mature native trees which act as unique stepping stones for a whole raft of different birds moving across open paddocks. These trees need to be regarded in the broader context of the environment rather than being considered of just localized significance. They act as a tree bank and belong to threatened communities. The broader landscape should be considered here of which these few trees in the Northern Array are part. Trees in this landscape are the building blocks of restoration and assist to retain some connectivity” (Dr. Andrew Huggett, pers. com.).

Mature trees near the top of Harriet Gully within the proposed array and proximal to two small dams are especially important for the plentiful bird life which exists in this vicinity and act as a way point for birds moving through the area. The two small dams are vital to bird habitat here and are extremely rich with native fresh water life such as frogs, crayfish and turtles.

The water in these dams needs to be conserved and construction must use alternative supplies. Could the array be located a little further to the West or run at an angle to preserve this important habitat around upper Harriet Gully.

The “Closing the Gap” project is a valuable effort to maintain bird species numbers. The proposed solar array effectively acts as a barrier to these birds, and counteracts the intent and work of the project. Proponents from East and West of the array and highly respected ornithologists and conservationists are gravely concerned about the effect this development will produce.

My wife and I feel personally thwarted in our efforts, with the sudden appearance on the scene of the New England Solar Farm with its proposals. We have spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours to make our contribution to “Closing the Gap” by fencing off areas and planting and tending 3,000 trees! Many other landholders must be in the same situation – some of whom have made huge investments towards “Closing the Gap”. Hopefully there is still some value in our work.

We suggest that the very least that the company needs to do at this point is to meet with highly respected, qualified and experienced professionals with avian conservation expertise to discuss openly the issues that have emerged for the purpose of minimizing the impact by the proposed solar farm on "Closing the Gap".

4. Security

- **Personal and Property Security.** We have enjoyed a maximum level of security since living at Goobragandra. With a large solar farm workforce living and working in the near proximity, this represents a decline in our personal and property security.

Perhaps the security fencing will serve not only to keep us out of the solar farm, but to also keep the workers within it! Any proposed security fence needs to be a priority of the construction.

- **Loss of Emergency Access.** Security fencing must also take into account the need for emergency access to the N.E. highway for Old Gostwyck Road Estate residents in the possibility of closure of the Old Gostwyck Road by flooding of Saumarez Creek, bushfire or accident on the Old Gostwyck Road. The Old Gostwyck Road is the only established available route out of the estate. An emergency access to the New England Highway via paddock tracks to the Saumarez war Service Road is in existence to the West of Goobragandra. *Emergency access must be maintained. (After a reconnaissance visit by Tim Kirk on 19.03.2019, we are satisfied that access is available, without adjustments, via farm tracks outside the array.)*

5. Feral Animals and Weeds

What measures will be adopted by the New England Solar Company to maintain the current efforts to remove feral animals and weeds? We are vigilant on the removal of feral cats, foxes, goats etc and weeds including Nodding Thistle, other thistles, black berries, serrated tussock, Chile Needle grass, Patterson's curse, Bathurst Bur and others.

6. Micro-Weather Patterns

We rely upon rainfall for all our water requirements. There is no provision in this area for a secure water supply. The weather here can be very fickle. Two locations 500m apart can receive very different rainfall amounts for the month. How could a solar farm of this size affect our rainfall? What is the albedo effect (reflectivity) of a solar farm of this size for local residents?

7. Property Value

There is no doubt that the proposed solar farm will fail to improve the value of our property. To the contrary, property prices are predicted to decline on account of the intruding factors described above. We are certainly very unhappy about this development.

What changes/offsets can be put in place to help alleviate this loss of property value?

8. CONCLUSION

Today (19.03.2019) we received a productive visit to Goobragandra and surrounds by Tim Kirk, Project Development Manager. He was impressively attentive to our needs.

It needs to be openly stated in this submission though, that we, the residents of Goobragandra, are decidedly unhappy with the projected significant losses imposed upon us and described (partially) above, due to the proposed construction of the New England Solar Farm. We are being unfairly and unjustly dispossessed of many of the very attributes that influenced our decision to live here many years ago. This dispossession of the quality of life at Goobragandra is currently causing us anxiety and concern. We are worried about the development and its impact. Our property has been a type of extension of our personality. Apparently, this is being curtailed and changed in a way that is beyond our control. Is it fair/just that one's abode has till now been zoned as rural – residential/pastoral and suddenly becomes zoned industrial, with all the consequent, incumbent negative changes?

We sincerely hope that our concerns, requests and suggestions made in this submission and to Tim Kirk can be addressed.

Tony and Frances Spiller