

19 March 2019

NSW Department of Planning & Environment  
GPO Box 39  
320 Pitt Street  
Sydney NSW 2001.

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission regarding the New England Solar Farm during the EIS exhibition phase.

As one of the landholders involved in the New England Solar Farm, I clearly have a financial interest in the project proceeding. However, I am also a fifth generation grazier in this district. I have always taken a keen interest in sustainable land management. It has always been my intention to hand the land to the next generation in the same – or better – condition as when I took it on. Accordingly, I felt a broader responsibility not to participate in this project if it might be detrimental to the environment, to the landscape, or to the district. Accordingly, before committing a portion of my land to solar panels, I undertook considerable research into the nature and scope of the project.

Ultimately, my research only reinforced the positive values of the project. Anthropogenic climate change is a real threat to our future. By providing a substantial clean-energy source, this solar farm will add significantly to our capacity to replace coal-fired energy. Locating the project here will feed directly into local objectives (Z-Net Uralla), regional plans (The New England North West Regional Plan 2036; RDANI Regional Plan 2016-2019) and state priorities (New England Priority Energy Zone, NSW REAP) for developing clean, sustainable energy sources in the most suitable locations.

My farm and home are within the 'Southern Array' of the project. I am aware that a couple of my neighbours object to this part of the project proceeding. While only one of these neighbours resides on land adjacent to the array, they are – of course – entitled to have their say. However, it is a stretch for these detractors to suggest that they represent the wider community.

I have seen and heard only positive feedback from the community. My other neighbours are supportive of the project (whether or not they are participants). If the objectors are truly concerned about the project's broader implications, it is unclear why they are only objecting to the Southern Array which is closest to their land. Additionally, the proponent has already scaled back the Southern Array in light of community feedback – including from these neighbours.

Environmentally, the project will be located partially on Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land. This land is currently used for grazing. I will continue to graze sheep – albeit at a reduced rate – under the panels. Normal grazing will continue on the balance of my farm (about half of its area). I understand that other participants will be doing the same. So, the land will remain largely unaffected by the panels for the duration of the project. At the end of the project – some 25 years hence – the land will be returned to its current level of grazing use. Thus, the project will have a similar impact on grazing as would – for example – the planting of trellised crops such as grapevines or the establishment of perennial tree-cropping species like chestnuts. Any suggestion that the land will simply be removed from production is erroneous.

Much has also been made of the Southern Array being located on a 'flood plain'. My land straddles Salisbury Waters, the principal sixth-order stream in the project area. My family has owned this land since 1950; in that time, there have been many floods. However, we have no record or recollection of any flood ever affecting the area planned for solar panels. Our records accord with the proponents flood mapping and the proposed siting of the arrays away from any identified flood-prone areas.

Economically, the project will have substantial local benefit. For example, my farm will be 'drought-proofed'. Much-needed infrastructure improvements on my property will be funded by solar farm income. This means direct local spending and employment. Indeed, the majority of the income that I receive from the solar farm will be spent or invested locally. This is in addition to the jobs (both temporary and ongoing) provided by the project itself and the proponent's community benefit sharing initiative.

Aesthetically, from my first-hand observations of existing solar farms, they are not the eyesore that some might suggest. They certainly look different to the 'natural' landscape, but it does not follow that they are therefore ugly. Additionally, the rolling hills of New England mean that only relatively small areas of the array will be visible from any given vantage point. While visual impacts are obviously subjective, solar farms in other districts have become attractions in their own right. They are often the focus of visitor interest and organised tours. Examples include the Gullen Range Wind/Solar farm (NSW), Uterne (Alice Springs, NT) and Bridgewater (Vic). This rebuffs the suggestion that our district's visual amenity will be destroyed and that tourism could be adversely affected.

This is such an important project from a local, regional and global perspective. Therefore, it must be supported. It cannot be derailed or diminished in scope by a minority of detractors. I encourage the Department to favourably review this proposal on its considerable merits, in its entirety.

Yours faithfully

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