

# **Submission to NSW Department of Planning and Environment**

## **New England Solar Farm**

**Tom and Sue Newsome**

**778 Old Gostwyck Rd, Kellys Plains, NSW 2350**

**20 March, 2019**

### **Background**

My family live at our 80 Hectare property "Cloud Hill", which adjoins the New England Solar Farm on the northern edge of the project.

I am against the project on the basis of negative outcomes for the following aspects of our business and lifestyle.

- 1) Property Value
- 2) Security
- 3) Biosecurity
  - a. Weeds
  - b. Pests
  - c. Noise
- 4) Environmental impact
  - a. Dust
  - b. Vibration
  - c. Light
- 5) Equity
- 6) Lifestyle and Amenity
- 7) Conduct of the Applicant's business
- 8) Community impact
- 9) Business
  - a. Livestock
  - b. Horses
  - c. Tourism
  - d. Education

## **Submission in response to UPC Renewables proposed Solar farm**

### **Background**

UPC renewables have lodged an environment impact statement for the erection of a solar farm in the productive grazing area of New England in New South Wales.

### **Introduction**

The Newsome family purchased an unnamed 80 hectare paddock that was sub divided from an adjacent grazing property in 2011. Since purchase, the current owners have invested over \$1million in the property, replaced 90% of fencing, erected a beautiful 516.5m<sup>2</sup> homestead, hayshed, horse arena, tack room, garden sheds and cattle yards. In addition a 10.4kw stand-alone solar system and solar powdered stock watering system have been installed. The entire property has been pasture improved and fertilised annually with three dams built and two dams extensively renovated. As a result, the Newsomes have created a beautiful property, unique to the district, all within 10km of Armidale.

Cloud Hill is a valuable property, due to the beautiful views, the quality infrastructure and complete absence of noise and dust along with the absence of light at night.

We object to the project because of the impact on:

- our family home;
- the value of the parcel of land we have developed; and
- our livestock grazing business.

### **Impacts particularised**

#### **Environmental Planning issues**

The land where Cloud Hill is located is zoned Primary Production under the Uralla Local Environmental Plan 2012 (LEP). The development being proposed is only permitted with consent under the LEP.

We are concerned regarding the impact that the proposed development will have on the outstanding biodiversity value of our property. On and near Cloud Hill are species of flora and fauna that may be impacted by the proposed development. We understand that the New England Tableland Bioregion, of which Cloud Hill is a part, provides habitat for 68 flora species listed in the schedules of the Threatened Species Conservation Act. Thirty of these species are listed as endangered, 39 are listed as vulnerable.

In terms of fauna the "New England Tableland Bioregion supports a considerable proportion of the endangered regent honeyeater (*Xanthomyza phrygia*) population in woodland fragments. Numbers of grassland and ground-feeding insectivorous birds have declined in the bioregion, as have some temperate woodland and forest species, mainly due to changes caused by agriculture (eg. land

clearing and habitat fragmentation), a trend which is likely to continue and has occurred across temperate Australia (**Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002**).

Ninety-two fauna species listed in the schedules of the TSC Act have been recorded in the New England Tablelands Bioregion (**NSW NPWS 2001**). Of these, 18 are listed as endangered, 72 are listed as vulnerable and a number of species are considered extinct in the bioregion.” (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/bioregions/NewEnglandTableland-Biodiversity.htm>)

We are concerned that the rich biodiversity that we have in and around Cloud Hill will be significantly disrupted with potential devastating effects and impacts on endangered and vulnerable fauna and flora due directly and indirectly to the proposed development.

It is our view that the proposed development will have significant adverse impacts, including environmental impacts on the natural environment of the locality including Cloud Hill. Further, the proposed development will have adverse social and economic impacts.

## **Noise**

We object to the project on the basis that noise associated with construction and ongoing management of the site will impact on our family and livestock.

Noise is measured in terms of background noise (loudness measured in decibels) and in terms of frequency (pitch) as measured in Hz.

Cattle have a range of hearing that is far broader than humans and can hear as low as 23Hz and as high as 35KHz. Any ongoing noise associated with the project will affect livestock, leading to negative outcomes for the farm business. These include effects on fertility and weight gain.

Our family built our home on Cloud Hill to have a peaceful existence in an area of absolute quiet. Any additional noise will have a negative impact on our lifestyle.

No actual noise measurements have been taken to show the effect of noise from the project on the Newsome household. Actual noise monitoring or data from similar projects must be supplied.

## **Dust**

Dust from the project will affect our lifestyle during the construction and operation. We currently live in a relative dust free environment due to our regenerative farming techniques that ensure 100% ground cover, even in the current 1 in 100 year drought.

Increased dust will have a negative effect of our livestock through increased incidence of respiratory diseases such as BVDV and dust borne bacterial infections such as pink eye.

No actual dust measurements have been considered to show the impact of dust from the project on the Newsome household. Dust ‘modelling’ is unacceptable as an estimate of actual dust pollution impact.

## **Light**

One of the aspects that makes Cloud Hill unique is the absence of light, enabling star gazing at night and an escape from the lights of town.

We object to the project on the basis that increased light effects the amenity of Cloud Hill and the property value.

## **View**

The view from the Cloud Hill homestead is exceptional, with 360° views of surrounding countryside for up to 40 kilometres. The view is consistently (practically always) commented on by visitors, including UPC representatives on their visits. Currently we can only see one house, which is located approximately 3 km to the north. The remaining view is of countryside and there is no light in addition to the house mentioned at night.

The photo montage provide in the EIS depicts an impact on our view to the north west, south and south west. This impact will be felt in lifestyle, amenity and land value, as much of the value of Cloud Hill is associated with the ambience that is linked to the view, lack of noise and dust and the countryside, while being located close to town. This property is unique in such attributes.

## **Land Value**

Cloud Hill is a valuable property, due to unique features such as:

- A modern, newly constructed, beautiful home
- Located within 10km of a major rural city
- Located within 15 minutes to a major rural airport
- Secure location at the end of a no through road
- Peaceful, quiet location with no discernible noise, dust or light
- Productive agricultural land, allowing income producing livestock enterprises

The diminution in the value of Cloud Hill will be significant.

## **Security**

Security is a major concern for our family. Tom Newsome travels consistently for work and it is important that the family feels secure in his absence. One of the key attributes of Cloud Hill is the security, being at the end of a dead end road, with full view of oncoming traffic. The Newsome family rarely has unwanted visitors and they have previously requested that Uralla Council erect a no through road sign to ensure their privacy.

The proposed 500 man accommodation camp located just to the south of Cloud Hill will decimate the privacy and security that is so important to the Newsome family. While the applicant can offer screening of personnel, this will not alleviate the perceived or real threat to the security of Sue when at home with the four children, while Tom is away.

We will either have to sell our property, move away and rent or Tom will have to stop travelling for work. If we choose the latter, it will risk the business at a potential cost of \$500,000 per year.

The remote Cloud Hill setting which currently provides comfort to the family while Tom is away will be transformed to a very unsettling location for a lady and four children alone at night, with five hundred men across a paddock from the home.

This item is not negotiable.

### **Pests**

There is a current threat from feral pests including rabbits, foxes, pigs, stray dogs and cats. The solar farm cannot realistically protect neighbours from impact from feral animals.

Additional use of contractors will be required to manage pests.

### **Weeds**

Noxious weeds are a constant issue for farmers, with the potential to degrade land, decimate farm production and reduce land values. The Kellys Plains area is affected by several damaging noxious weeds including Chilean Needle Grass, Serrated Tussock, Couch, Blackberry, Bracken fern, African Love Grass, Nodding thistle, Scotch thistle, Variegated thistle and Carpet grass. Seeds are spread by wind, vehicles, rainfall if let to seed.

The project will not be able to effectively control such weeds without a complete under carriage wash down process and a regular weed eradication effort.

Additional labour will be required to manage additional weed burden.

### **Fire**

With the onset of climate change, the New England is experiencing hotter, drier summer conditions. As a result there is an increased potential and impact for fires, including grass fires that could effect Cloud Hill. The project will increase the pasture dry matter yield and also has the potential to increase fire risk through electrical fault.

Additional labour will be required to manage fire risk.

### **Eco- Tourism**

We intend to transform Cloud Hill and our other properties Glenlivet and Long Point into a farm eco-tourism resort.

The home was built based on Spicers Peak Lodge, a similar luxury farm stay at Warwick in Queensland.

In order to do so, we have enabled ensuite plumbing in all bedrooms to move to bed and breakfast style rooms. The project will threaten the viability of this enterprise.

## Education

There is a growing market in Australia and Asia for education in both English, physical education and natural ecosystems. This is due to the emerging concerns in relation to the increasing urban environment around the world. These factors combine to provide a market for both tourism and education in a natural environment.

Sue is a teacher and holds a bachelor degree in Arts and a diploma in education. These qualification enable her to teach English and Geography at all levels.

We intended to incorporate education and training from our base at Cloud Hill, focussing on English and geography. We have purchased some of the most spectacular natural environments in the gorges that will provide a perfect environment for this enterprise.

## Ownership

UPC Renewables is a privately held company, whose ultimate ownership is a company based in Hong Kong. There is only one resident director. The other two directors both resided in Hong Kong. According to UPC staff that attended Cloud Hill on 16 August, 2018 the directors who reside in Hong Kong do so for "tax purposes".

This begs the question as to why our Government would allow a private enterprise which is unlikely to pay tax in Australia, based on its ownership and locality, to displace Australians and transform a productive agricultural setting of great beauty into an industrial site. The effect will be costly through decimated land values that reflect an industrial setting reminiscent of the Anthropocene.

**A once secure, idyllic family home will be replaced with a noisy, dusty, potentially unsafe industrial site.**

## Loss Quantification

I have quantified the loss to as follows:

### Quantified cost to the Newsome family and Outcross Pty Ltd

	Annual	Total (45 Years)	Notes
<b>1) Property Value</b>		\$1,100,000	Lost property value
<b>2) Security</b>	\$500,000	\$1,000,000	Effect on business due to inability to leave family
<b>3) Biosecurity</b>			
<b>a. Weeds</b>	\$4,800	\$216,000	Additional time, labour and weed management costs
<b>b. Pests</b>	\$4,800	\$216,000	Additional time, labour and weed management costs
<b>4) Environmental impact</b>			
<b>a. Dust</b>	\$10,000	\$450,000	Effect on family, lifestyle, cattle, horses and tourism
<b>b. Vibration</b>	\$10,000	\$450,000	Effect on family, lifestyle, cattle, horses and tourism
<b>c. Light</b>	\$10,000	\$450,000	Effect on family, lifestyle, cattle, horses and tourism
<b>d. Noise</b>	\$4,800	\$216,000	Effect on family, lifestyle, cattle, horses and tourism
<b>6) Lifestyle and Amenity</b>	\$20,000	\$900,000	Effect on family and lifestyle
<b>8) Community impact</b>	\$10,000	\$450,000	Effect on family, lifestyle, cattle, horses and tourism
<b>9) Business</b>			
<b>a. Livestock</b>	\$7,300	\$328,500	20% loss in production
<b>b. Horses</b>	\$10,000	\$450,000	Lost income from horse breeding
<b>c. Tourism</b>	\$124,100	\$5,584,500	Diminished opportunity for eco-tourism and education
<b>d. Education</b>	\$200,000	\$9,000,000	Diminished opportunity for Education
		<b>\$20,811,000</b>	