

Carrathool Shire Council

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16 August 2017

Email: Anthonyko@planning.nsw.gov.au
Department of Planning

Dear Anthony

HILLSTON SOLAR FARM

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Hillston Solar Farm. The farm will have an estimated capacity of 85 MW capable of providing electricity to power 32,000 homes annually.

Council understands that, as a result of preliminary planning, the site of the proposed development has been modified and reduced to minimise and avoid adverse environmental impacts. The site is 3.5 km south of Hillston and west of Kidman Way and comprises lots 22, 43, 61, 76, 77, 85, 100, 101 DP755189 and Lot 2 DP 626213.

The proposal involves:

- Construction of approximately 300,000 solar (photovoltaic) panels with steel framed support structures and an east-west tracking configuration;
- Installation of approximately 38 x 2.5 MW inverters
- Administrative hub including a demountable office with staff amenities and control room and containerised /equipment storage sheds
- Connection to the Hillston 132 Kv substation
- Internal access roads, parking and manoeuvring areas
- Two new intersections north and south of Kidman Way
- Vehicular access over the paper road between the Hillston substation and the remainder of the development site.

Council has reviewed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) by EMM in relation to biodiversity, heritage, land capability, air quality (noise, dust, visual, lighting), transport and public health impacts.

While, Council generally supports the conclusions of the EIS there are concerns in relation to the adequacy of consultation with Hillston Airport User Group and impacts to airport operations as well as potential impacts of distraction, glint and glare to travellers on Kidman Way and the adequacy of landscaping to buffer, screen and enhance the development in a generally cleared landscape.

Impact to Hillston Airport Operations

The Hillston airport is located 2.5 km north of the development site. While the EIS comments on the development not being runway aligned and assessed impacts to take off and landing operations as unlikely, there is insufficient evidence of consultation with airport user groups to properly verify conclusions.

This is a concern, as Council staff are not qualified to comment on impacts to aviation and Hillston Airport is not certified or registered and CASA has no oversight of operations. Further consultation and engagement with Hillston Airport user group is warranted, as originally recommended by CASA, to clarify and confirm report impacts and conclusions. This is particularly important considering the nature and extent of light aircraft and crop duster usage within the region.

Impact to Travellers on Kidman Way

Unless the development is appropriately screened, there is the potential to cause distraction to motorists on Kidman Way particularly given the glint and or glare that may result from the development and its location on a relatively straight north, north westerly alignment between Goolgowi and Hillston.

Visual Impacts and Adequacy of Landscaping

The development site has an area of around 300 ha and a length of approximately 4 km. While the footprint has been compartmentalised north and south to avoid remnant vegetation, impacts to Aboriginal cultural heritage as well as avoid/minimise flooding and drainage impacts there remains a significant development footprint within a generally flat, agricultural landscape where many overstorey woodland species have been previously cleared.

There is the opportunity to improve conservation values by the provision of appropriate endemic landscaping to screen structures. It is recommended that boundary screening be provided on the eastern, northern and north western boundary to screen the development from sensitive receptors, facilitate safe traffic movement and promote connectivity particularly given the regional context and the location of Lachlan Valley National Park and Nombinnie Nature Reserve.

It is also preferred that if possible landscaping be provided outside of boundary fencing for improved screening of structures and enhanced amenity.

While the EIS comments that the presence of existing endemic vegetation means that views *from most viewpoints* will be protected a landscaping plan should be prepared to ensure adequacy of screening. Any Environmental Management Plan prepared should also provide for the containment and management of weed species.

A minor issue concerns access and entry/egress arrangements. Internal access roads should be constructed in accordance with Austroad standards for rural roads to minimise potential dust impacts. Entry gates should also be positioned so that sufficient area is available for the largest vehicle servicing the site to be able to stand free without obstructing the road reserve/carriageway.

All access, manoeuvring and carparking areas should be appropriately constructed and maintained for the life of the development. Any underground cabling to be left in situ after decommissioning should be appropriately GPS or survey located.

Council also has a S94A Contributions Plan which should be considered and where relevant, applied to this development.

The development proposal offers significant benefits for the local and regional community including employment of up to 100 FTE during construction and up to 5 FTE during the operational life of the facility of over 25 years.

Council wishes to confirm its support for the development subject to the imposition and implementation of appropriate environmental mitigation measures.

Yours sincerely



JOANNE TREACY
GENERAL MANAGER