



DOC17/627880
SSD 8573

Ms Elle Donnelley
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Department of Planning and Environment
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Dear Ms Donnelley

Wellington Solar Farm - SSD 8573

I refer to your email dated 13 December 2017 seeking comments from the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) on the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Wellington Solar Farm.

OEH has reviewed the EIS and in summary:

- The Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment is adequate, although the need for test excavations at PADs 1 and 2 requires further consideration.
- The patch of Box Gum grassy woodland critically endangered ecological community in the centre of the site should be completely avoided. This and other patches of White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum endangered ecological community located on-site, but outside the impact area, should be assessed for their suitability as offset areas. The potential to enhance and link these areas should be investigated.

Detailed comments and recommendations are provided in **Attachment A**.

If you have any enquiries, please contact Liz Mazzer, Conservation Planning Officer on 6883 5325 or email liz.mazzer@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

PETER CHRISTIE

Director North West

Regional Operations Division

25 January 2018

Contact officer: LIZ MAZZER
6883 5325

Attachment A

OEH review of Wellington Solar Farm EIS

1 The Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment is adequate

OEH notes that this is a draft report and we may have further comments on subsequent versions.

The EIS contains an adequate field survey assessment supported by an appropriate literature review of the area designated for the proposed Solar Farm proposal. The Aboriginal cultural heritage (ACH) assessment has been conducted as per the standard requirements of the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements, including Aboriginal consultation.

OEH accepts the findings, and supports all of the recommendations as written in section 9 of the ACH assessment except recommendation 5 which refers to excavation of PAD1 and PAD2 (see additional comments in 2 below).

Recommendation

- 1.1 Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 in section 9 of the ACH assessment be implemented.

2 Further consideration is needed before conducting test excavations for ACH

OEH has not sighted convincing scientific evidence to support the need for test excavations at PADs 1 and 2.

The information provided in the ACH assessment highlights the low significance of the Aboriginal objects and the intense land use disturbance history across the project area. The archaeological descriptions indicate limited opportunities for subsurface discoveries of high significance.

Test excavations are generally reserved for circumstances where supporting information indicates potential for significance of a location other than presence or absence of objects. A test program for the proposed Solar Farm project may offer disproportionate returns for ACH information of significance versus the costs incurred from undertaking the program.

Should the proponent propose a test excavation program, a supporting rationale and details of the proposal will need to be provided in the Cultural Heritage Management Plan. This will need to include descriptions of how the requirements for test excavation in the *Code of Practice for Archaeological Investigation of Aboriginal Objects* in NSW will be applied.

OEH will make further assessment of the test excavation proposal (outlined in recommendation 5 of section 9 of the ACH assessment) during consultation for the draft Cultural Heritage Management Plan.

Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cultural Heritage Management Plan should include a rationale for, and details of, any proposed ACH test excavations of PADs 1 and 2.
- 2.2 OEH is to be consulted regarding the development of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan.

3 The patch of critically endangered ecological community in the centre of the site should be avoided

OEH notes that the proponent has designed the layout of the solar farm to largely avoid patches of native vegetation that are in moderate to good condition.

The BAR identifies that there is a patch of native vegetation in the centre of the site that meets the definition of the Commonwealth White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland critically endangered ecological community (CEEC).

Approximately 17% of this patch will be impacted by the proposal. The BAR considers that this loss is potentially significant as it is likely to reduce the long-term capacity of the patch to survive. The BAR recommends that the proposal be referred to the Commonwealth under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to determine whether it is a controlled action.

Figure 3-10 in the BAR indicates that the area of the CEEC to be disturbed is a narrow strip along its southern edge. OEH recommends that the layout of the solar farm be adjusted to totally avoid the CEEC. No referral would be required if the area was not impacted.

Recommendation

- 3.1 Impacts to the area of Box Gum grassy woodland CEEC in the centre of the site be totally avoided.

4 Areas of White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum EEC should be enhanced and expanded

The BAR has calculated that the total area of native vegetation to be impacted is 144.22 ha. This includes 135.66 ha of White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum endangered ecological community that generated low site value scores (<17) under the Framework for Biodiversity Assessment, has generated zero ecosystem credits, and does not need to be offset.

A total of 203 ecosystem credits have been generated in the development area that do require offsetting.

Targeted surveys were conducted, and habitat components assessed, for candidate species credit species. No species credits have been generated for the site.

OEH agrees that the Masked Owl is unlikely to be breeding at the site, so no species credits are required for this species.

The BAR has not identified or assessed any potential offset areas, although it does state (section 11.1) that 149 ha of native vegetation occurs on site outside the impact area that could be considered for offsets.

OEH considers that the patches of White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum EEC located on-site but outside the impact area should be assessed for their suitability as offset areas as part of the proposed biodiversity offset strategy for the project.

The Flora and Fauna Management Plan (FFMP) should consider the potential to link and enhance remnant patches on the site, particularly if the patches form part of the offset. OEH supports the use of indigenous plant species associated with White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum EEC in landscaping.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Patches of White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum EEC located on-site but outside the impact area should be assessed for their suitability as offset areas as part of the proposed biodiversity offset strategy for the project.
- 4.2 The Flora and Fauna Management Plan should consider the potential to link and enhance remnant patches on the site, particularly if the patches form part of the offset.
- 4.3 Indigenous plant species associated with White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum EEC should be used in landscaping.