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Dear Iwan

**SUBJECT: ESCO PACIFIC WYALONG SOLAR FARM SSD 9564**

Thank you for the opportunity for Bland Shire Council to provide a submission on the proposal by ESCO Pacific to develop the Wyalong Solar Farm SSD 9564 located at 1409 Newell Highway West Wyalong, Lot 160 DP750615 (The Solar Farm).

The Solar Farm will generate up to 100 MW of alternating current (AC) clean and renewable electricity through the conversion of solar radiation to electricity via photovoltaic modules (solar panels). The electricity output from the project will then be supplied to the Essential Energy electricity network via high voltage cables connecting to the 132 kV transmission line which transects the development site.

The EIS mentions that the total capital investment value of the solar farm (estimated at approximately \$130 million) classifies it as a State Significant Development (SSD) to be assessed by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE). As an SSD, the project requires the preparation of an EIS under Part 4 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

The project is a large (256 ha) infrastructure project that is expected to create up to 150 jobs during construction and up to four full-time and eight part-time positions when operational. Construction is expected to take approximately nine months and the project is expected to operate for 40 years.

**Project description**

The Solar Farm will comprise up to 350,000 solar photovoltaic (PV) modules, known more commonly as PV modules or solar panels. The panels will be mounted in rows on horizontal tracking or fixed tilt systems.

Key infrastructure items to be established for the project include:

- installation of solar panels in regular arrays
- metal mounting structures (up to 4 m in height)
- aboveground and underground DC cabling (low voltage)
- central inverters, step-up transformers, and switchgear (PCUs) located in 40 foot containers or container skid pads (up to 26 PCUs, 3 m in height)
- battery storage area
- underground AC cabling that will run from the PCUs to the solar farm substation (high voltage)
- a main step-up transformer and associated equipment
- a synchronous condenser to adjust conditions on the electrical power transmission grid
- perimeter safety fencing and a fixed, closed-circuit television (CCTV) system
- supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) control systems
- site office and staff amenities
- maintenance shed
- permanent staff and contractor car parking area
- permanent all-weather access and access road leading to the office and substation (shared access with Essential Energy)
- internal vehicle access tracks (4 m) leading to solar arrays and PCUs
- temporary site compound, lay-down area, and equipment storage areas during construction.

Each solar panel will be fixed to a metal mounting structure that will be piled or screwed into the ground without the need for any excavation work or use of concrete. This technique is used to minimise ground disturbance.

The project will also include the potential for battery storage to be installed on site. The batteries would be made of lithium-ion and housed in containerised packs, and would provide a total capacity of 25 MW and 50 MWh.

### **Project benefits**

The EIS mentions that The Solar Farm will have the following benefits:

#### **Government level benefits**

The Wyalong Solar Farm would contribute Australia's GHG commitments by reducing emissions associated with energy use and contributing to the achievement of the RET. The solar farm would also be part of the transition away from fossil fuel reliance to cleaner electricity generation, and the transition to increased energy security through a more diverse energy mix. It is therefore consistent with, and strongly supports, current policy direction at both a Commonwealth and State government level.

Key project benefits include:

- increased energy security through a more diverse energy mix (DoI 2016)
- increased security and reliability of the National Electricity Market (NEM) by reducing pressure on electricity prices during sunlight hours through low cost generation and increased competition in the NEM
- generation of approximately 130 MW (DC) at full capacity, which is enough to power approximately 32,000 NSW homes (DoI 2016)

- reduction in State GHG emissions – based on an emission factor of 0.87 kg of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>-e)/kWh (DIICCSRTE 2013) the proposed solar farm would displace approximately 190,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-e or GHG emissions per year.

For context, a solar energy facility that displaces 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum is the equivalent of taking approximately 30,000 petrol-fuelled cars off the road each year, based on an average car in NSW travelling 14,100 km per year (DIT 2011).

The project is classified as a State Significant Development and has an estimated capital investment value of approximately \$130 million. It therefore represents a significant new investment in the State of NSW, with significant direct and indirect economic flow-on effects. These effects will be particularly apparent at a regional level, where the project represents welcome investment in an important rural area of the State and will contribute to a more diversified and sustainable income base.

### **Local project benefits**

At a local level, project benefits are expected to include:

- An increase in direct local employment. The project is expected to require up to 150 staff and contractors during the nine-month construction period, with many of these drawn from the local area. During operation the project is expected to provide long-term local employment opportunities for the four full-time and eight part-time staff, as well as requiring support from local contractors in site management and maintenance activities. The expected 40-year duration of the project means that it will be a long-term employer in the region.
- Stimulation of the local economy, particularly during the construction period, through workforce demand for accommodation, hospitality, retail and other services, as well as through the local hire and supply of equipment and materials.
- The provision of education and training opportunities for contractors and local residents, as well as practical on-the-job experience, resulting in an increase and diversification of the local skills base – with many of these skills directly transferable to other projects.
- The project has the potential to act as a seed for further investment in the region, particularly in the area of renewables and new technologies. This will help diversify the local income base and provide alternate sources of income during periods when tough climatic or market conditions are depressing agricultural returns.
- The project assists with the local energy system by supplying the load at the Lake Cowal mine. By supplying the mine with nearby generation, rather than from the Hunter Valley, Snowy Scheme or Newcastle regions, the losses in the system are reduced. Reducing these losses will likely reduce the loss factor costs incurred by Lake Cowal mine.

### **Bland Shire Council**

Bland Shire Council is fully supportive of the sustainable solar energy industry and ESCO Pacific establishing The Solar Farm and have been engaged with ESCO Pacific and the community from the inception of this project. Bland Shire Council acknowledges that there is broad public support for the adoption of alternative, renewable, low emission energy generation sources.

Bland Shire Council acknowledges the benefits of The Solar Farm at a local, regional and national scale. It is understood that the project will improve security of electricity supply, create employment opportunities and will contribute to the State and Federal Governments' targets for renewable energy and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Solar Project has the potential to inject millions of dollars into the Australian economy over its life time. Bland Shire Council

anticipates that this economic injection may flow through to the local economy through the diversification of the local economy, the building of local skills, the use of local contractors and local services, particularly during the construction phase.

Noting the positive implications of The Solar Farm, Bland Shire Council also seeks to ensure that the project is constructed, operated and decommissioned in a way that any potential negative impacts on the local and wider communities are minimised.

## **Consultation**

ESCO Pacific has prepared a Stakeholder and Community Consultation Plan to guide communication activities relating to the project and assist in the preparation of the EIS.

ESCO Pacific has consulted with Bland Shire Council and the community and the immediate landholders with regards to The Solar Farm.

It is crucial that this consultation with Bland Shire Council, the community and landholders is maintained by ESCO Pacific during the construction, operation and decommissioning of The Solar Farm.

## **Visual Impacts and Screening**

The EIS mentions at the use of the site as The Solar Farm would not lead to any ongoing impacts that would detrimentally impact on the way of life or operations of the nearby properties. The vista of solar panels is a significant change from cropping and grazing that is currently undertaken in this area.

The EIS mentions that there are five scattered residences (R1-R5) are located on rural properties within 2 km of the site (see Section 2.5). These residences are located between 300 m and 1.4 km from the site, as shown in Figure 8.11 of the EIS.

The EIS also mentions that there are nine viewpoints in the vicinity of the project have been considered as part of the statutory assessment (see Table 8.10 and Table 8.11, and Figure 8.11).

Bland Shire Council would like to see a landscaping plan be included as part of the overall site to ensure that the visual impact of The Solar Farm to the identified residences is minimised and also provide screening of the Newell Highway to prevent drivers being distracted as they drive past The Solar Farm.

## **Waste**

The development of The Solar Farm will generate significant volumes of waste. The volume of waste that could be expected to be generated from the construction, operation and decommissioning of The Solar Farm would have a significant impact on the capacity of the landfills in the Bland Shire including the West Wyalong Landfill.

Bland Shire Council requests that a detailed Waste Management Plan be required as a condition of development consent and that the Waste Management Plan includes anticipated volumes and types of waste that will be generated by The Solar Farm.

In preparation of the EIS, ESCO Pacific undertook a review of Bland Shire Councils seven landfills in preparation of the CEMP to understand capacity, the types of materials acceptable and accessibility of each site considering the location and requirements of The Solar Farm.

Bland Shire Council has identified Kikoira as the preferred landfill for The Solar Farm waste, and the waste is to be buried at the Kikoira landfill site. The West Wyalong Landfill does not have the capacity to receive The Solar Farm waste as the capacity is allocated for current and projected use by the residents of the Bland Shire but there may be an opportunity for ESCO Pacific to work with Bland Shire Council to expand this landfill to accommodate The Solar Farm waste.

### **Approvals from Bland Shire Council / Principal Certifying Authority**

Construction certificate(s) will be required for the proposed works on site and more detailed plans will be required to determine if the following will need the consent of Bland Shire Council or a Principal Certifying Authority:

- The solar arrays and associated structures
- The proposed battery storage facility
- The amenity buildings on site
- The details of the potable water supply on the site during construction, operation and decommissioning
- The details of the onsite sewerage waste management system and the disposal of the effluent from the site during construction, operation and decommissioning

### **Fire Management**

A fire management plan will be required for the control of fires at The Solar Farm including the battery storage area. Efficient access suitable for firefighting vehicles is required to be established and maintained over The Solar Farm site during the construction, operation and decommissioning.

The EIS mentions that a water tank, solely for fire protection purposes, will be located adjacent to the site office. The tank will be located such that there is suitable all-weather access for the Rural Fire Service (RFS) fire tankers and appliances. A total minimum tank capacity of 40,000 litres would be recommended. Equipment and facilities for a battery fire should also be included in the fire management plan.

### **Weed Management**

The EIS mentions that the land between the panels and along the boundary of the solar farm will require maintenance to control vegetation growth. Such maintenance will be undertaken either through the use of livestock (sheep) or by mowing with a slasher. The Solar Farm must be managed so as to minimise weeds on site and also for the containment and management of weed species.

### **Feral Animals**

The Solar Farm must be managed to minimise all feral animals on site. The Riverina Regional Strategic Pest Animal Plan 2018-2023 is a good source of information.

## **Employment**

The EIS mentions that during the construction period The Solar Farm is expected to create up to 150 jobs and up to four full-time and eight part-time positions when operational. Construction is expected to take approximately eight months and the project is expected to operate for 40 years.

It is expected that the majority of the workforce will be sourced from the local area. Non-local workforce or contractors are likely to come from other areas of NSW and are likely to seek accommodation in West Wyalong and other regional centres in Southern NSW (see Section 8.12). It is expected the majority of the construction staff movements will be made to/from site using mini buses from West Wyalong.

Bland Shire Council would like to see local labourers, trades and services engaged with this project where possible and appropriate.

## **Accommodation for workers during construction, operation and decommissioning**

The EIS mentions that during the construction period The Solar Farm is expected to create up to 150 jobs and up to four full-time and eight part-time positions when operational. Construction is expected to take approximately eight months and the project is expected to operate for 40 years.

Bland Shire Council is aware that accommodation is extremely limited in the Bland Shire and the surrounding Local Government Areas as a result of:

- Evolution Cowal Gold Operations
- Inland Rail
- Parkes Intermodal Terminal
- Solar Farms
- Clean TeQ Sunrise Operations
- Newell Highway projects
- Mineral Exploration Activities

Bland Shire Council would like to see ESCO Pacific accommodate the 150 construction, operational and decommissioning workers in the Bland Shire in West Wyalong.

## **Tourism**

The EIS mentions that the Solar Farm has the potential to create a local tourist attraction. Bland Shire Council would like to see ESCO Pacific develop The Solar Farm as an education and tourism attraction. Suitable areas for tourist facilities including an elevated viewing platform, parking and signage should be considered in the development of the site.

## **Voluntary Planning Agreement / Proposed Community Fund**

In accordance with Section 94A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 Bland Shire Council is open to contributions under a Voluntary Planning Agreement and 94A Contributions of 1% as this development is valued in excess of \$200,000.

The 94A contributions may be allocated to the following categories:

- Economic Development and Tourism
- Roads and Related Infrastructure including Signage
- Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure
- Stormwater Drainage
- Open Space and Recreation
- Civic and Community Facilities and Infrastructure

It is noted that the capital cost of The Solar Farm is approximately \$130 million and will engage a construction workforce of 150 for a period of up to nine months that will have a significant impact on infrastructure and facilities of the Bland Shire. Accordingly, Bland Shire Council believes that there should be a monetary contribution paid under a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA). Bland Shire Council would be happy to work with ESCO Pacific to negotiate the VPA which may also include a community fund.

### **Project Decommissioning**

At the end of the life of The Solar Farm, the site is to be reverted back to its former agricultural use. To ensure that the site is adequately decommissioned at the end of the lifespan of The Solar Farm, a Decommissioning Plan should be prepared in consultation with the landholder and Bland Shire Council as a condition of the consent.

As mentioned previously Bland Shire Council is fully supportive of the sustainable solar energy industry and ESCO Pacific establishing The Solar Farm and should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact either myself on (02) 6972 2266 or Jeff Stien on (02) 6979 0244.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ray Smith  
General Manager