

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Griffith Solar Farm

Modification 1 (SSD 6604 MOD 1)

1. BACKGROUND

Neoen Australia Pty Ltd (Neoen) has approval to construct and operate the Griffith Solar Farm, located approximately 7 kilometres (km) southeast of Griffith (see **Figure 1**).

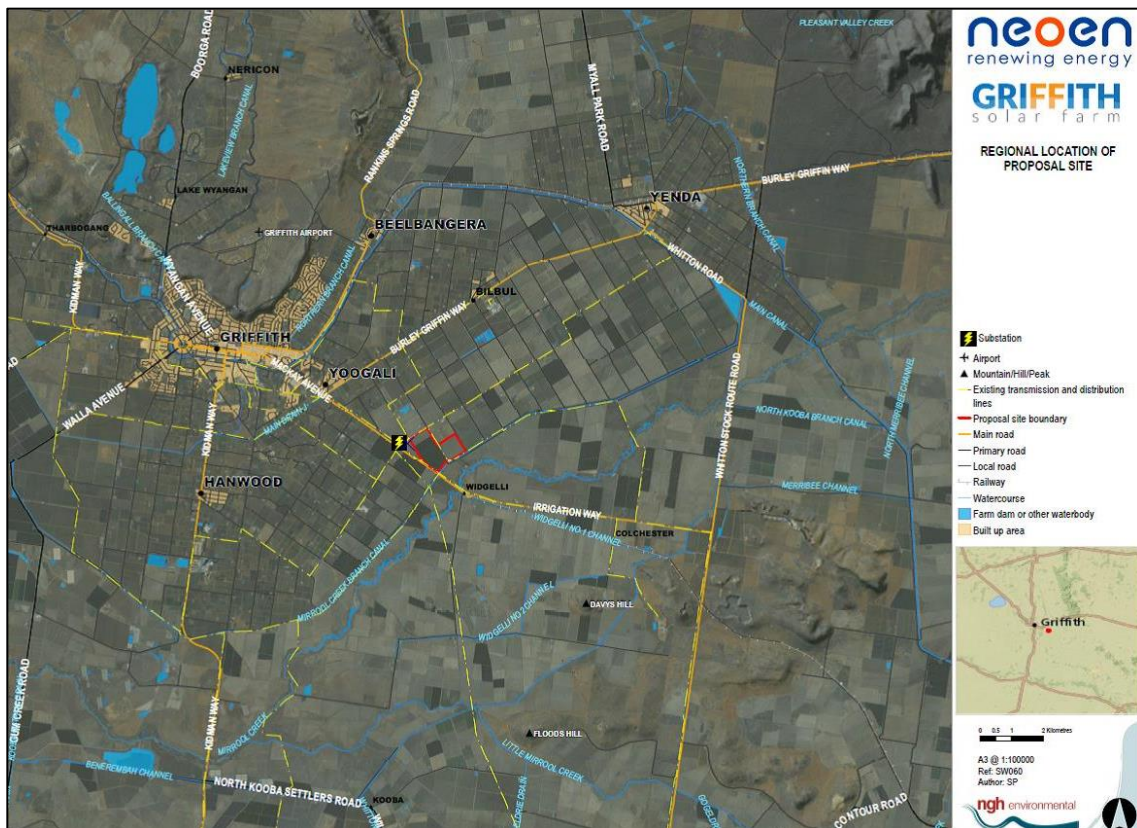


Figure 1: Project site location

On 14 June 2016, the Executive Director, Resource Assessments and Business Systems, as delegate of the Minister for Planning, granted approval for the Griffith Solar Farm (SSD 6604). The consent allows for the construction, upgrading and decommissioning of a photovoltaic (PV) solar farm with an initial capacity of 60 megawatts (MW), which includes:

- approximately 200,000 solar panels supported by approximately 25,000 piles;
- approximately 26 PV skids, each containing an inverter;
- one delivery station, site facilities and car parking; and
- a 33 kilovolt (kV) power line connecting to the existing Griffith/Yoogali Transgrid substation.

The consent also requires Neoen to upgrade a number of roads along the approved haulage route, including Hamilton Road and Poletta Road.

The project layout, which is located immediately southeast of the Riverina Solar Farm, is shown in **Figure 2**. Neoen has yet to commence construction of the project.



Figure 2: Approved project layout

2. PROPOSED MODIFICATION

Neoen is seeking to modify the development consent for the Griffith Solar Farm to reduce the costs associated with upgrading sections of the approved haulage route along Hamilton Road and Poletta Road.

The proposed modification includes (see **Figures 2 and 3**):

- removing the Poletta Road site access point and requiring all vehicles to access the site via the Hamilton Road access point;
- constructing an unsealed internal access road to facilitate vehicle movements around the site and between the eastern and western lots; and
- constructing an access way between the eastern and western lots at the Poletta Road/Mirrool Branch Canal Road intersection.

The proposed modification is described in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) submitted in support of the application (see **Appendix A**).



Figure 3: Modified project layout

3. STATUTORY CONTEXT

The development was originally approved under Section 89E of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) and any modification to this consent must be made under Section 96 of the EP&A Act.

Based on its assessment, the Department is satisfied that the application can be characterised as a modification to the existing consent as the proposal would not significantly alter the approved layout or disturbance area of the development, nor would it increase the environmental impacts of the development as approved.

The Minister for Planning is the approval authority for the application. However, under the Minister's delegation dated 16 February 2015, the Director, Resource Assessments may determine the proposed modification as Griffith City Council does not object to the proposal, Neoen has not made reportable political donations, and no public submissions were received on the proposal.

4. CONSULTATION

The Department made the application and EIS publicly available on its website on 10 October 2016. Given the minor nature of the application, the Department did not formally seek submissions on the application, but referred the application to Griffith City Council and the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS). Neither agency raised any concerns about the proposed modification (see **Appendix B**). Relevant agency comments are detailed in section 5 below.

5. ASSESSMENT

In assessing the merits of the proposal, the Department has considered:

- the modification application;
- the EIS and conditions of consent for the original project;
- relevant environmental planning instruments, policies and guidelines, and
- the requirements of the EP&A Act.

Under the modified access arrangement, vehicles would cross Poletta Road at its intersection with Mirrool Branch Canal Road to access the eastern lot. Council and RMS raised no concerns in this regard, provided the access way is only used for travel between lots.

The existing conditions of consent require Neoen to prepare a detailed Traffic Management Plan in consultation with RMS and Council to address post-approval traffic management issues, including undertaking pre-development dilapidation surveys, repairing any roads damaged by development related vehicles, and minimising traffic safety issues and disruption to local users. With these measures in place, the Department is satisfied that the safety, efficiency and capacity of the road network at the Poletta Road crossing would not be compromised.

The Department also notes that vehicles accessing the Riverina Solar Farm would have exited the local road network prior to the intersection of Hamilton Road with the Griffith Solar Farm site entry point. Consequently, there would be no cumulative traffic impacts associated with the modified access arrangement.

The modification would facilitate a net reduction in transport related activities on the local road network during the construction, upgrading and decommissioning phases of the development. In particular, development related vehicles would use less of the local road network by only accessing the site via the Hamilton Road access point (see **Figure 2**).

The Department is satisfied that the existing conditions of consent would mitigate and/or manage any potential impacts associated with vehicles using the unsealed internal roads. Specifically, the existing consent already requires Neoen to minimise noise and dust impacts associated with the development.

Additionally, the potential impacts associated with road upgrades (e.g. noise, dust or disruption for road users) would be reduced as Neoen would no longer need to upgrade the Hamilton Road/Poletta Road intersection, or the sections of Hamilton Road and Poletta Road between the two approved site access points.

6. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

The Department has drafted a recommended Notice of Modification (see **Appendix C**), as well as a consolidated version of the development consent as modified (see **Appendix D**).

The recommended conditions require Neoen to access the site via one access point on Hamilton Road, construct unsealed internal access roads, and access the eastern lot via a crossing at the Poletta Road/Mirrool Branch Canal Road intersection. Additionally, the requirements to upgrade the relevant sections of the local road network have been removed.

Neoen has accepted the proposed amended conditions.

7. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the modification application in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements, having regard to the EIS, comments from agencies, and documentation relating to the original project.

The modified access arrangements would not increase the environmental impacts of the project as approved, and the existing conditions of consent, which require a Traffic Management Plan and the minimisation of potential noise and dust emissions, would accommodate the proposed modification.

Further, the modification would facilitate a net reduction in transport related activities on the local road network during the construction, upgrading and decommissioning phases of the development.


Consequently, the Department is satisfied that the proposed modification is in the public interest and should be approved.

8. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the A/Director, Resource Assessments:

- **considers** the findings and recommendations of this report;
- **determines** that the modification falls within the scope of Section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act;
- **approves** the modification application under Section 96(1A) of the EP&A Act; and
- **signs** the Notice of Modification (**Appendix C**).


Elle Donnelley
Planning Officer
Resource Assessments
25.10.16


Clay Preshaw
A/Director
Resource Assessments
25/10/16

APPENDIX A:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

APPENDIX B:

AGENCY COMMENTS

APPENDIX C:
NOTICE OF MODIFICATION

APPENDIX D:

CONSOLIDATED CONSENT
