

23rd October 2019

Planning Officer

NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment

OBJECTION – DA SSD_9143

Proposed Chicken Farm at 52 Sinclair Street Goulburn.

As the President of The Goulburn Group (TGG) I represent a community association with a strong 12 year track record in shaping sustainable economic development and environmental protection in the Goulburn region.

TGG strongly opposes the development application for a poultry processing plant on the following grounds:

1. The proposed water usage is excessive and squanders an invaluable community and environmental resource in a drying region.

Annual rainfall statistics used in the EIS are out of date. Goulburn's rainfall has been falling for some years and water security is top of mind for residents and decision makers since the Millennial Drought. We now rely on the back up of the Sydney water catchment when local reservoirs run low. Goulburn's water usage is tied to water security beyond our region.

Council has planned ahead for water and sewerage infrastructure to accommodate a modest increase in resident population. Most of this added capacity will be swallowed up by the proposed development. So what guarantee of water security remains for local residents?

2. The processing plant will negatively impact on the region's agricultural profile.

Currently regional agriculture is a diverse mix of food and fibre based primarily on cattle and sheep as well as cropping. Approval of a large poultry processing plant is likely to be the first step in shifting agriculture from grazing and cropping to battery farming. Reshaping our region around poultry slaughter raises important economic, environment and social issues in the medium and long term.

TGG has been intimately involved with past Council economic development and sustainability committees that have focused on attracting visitors, residents and industries to the region. This strategy acknowledges a shift towards a cleaner and greener economy. Liveability has become a central driver.

For example our wind and solar resources have opened up considerable development opportunities. Large scale renewable energy projects now provide considerable income to the local economy and a boost to a diverse profile of local jobs in construction, security, technology, project management, health and safety, engineering, maintenance and environmental restoration.

Clean energy projects provide drought proof income for farmers hosting turbines and solar arrays as well as neighbour agreements facilitating payments to landholders adjacent to wind and solar farms. Farmers can downsize stock herds during unfavourable periods thus protecting pasture and soils thanks to the value adding that comes from renewable energy infrastructure. This is an example of a positive 21st century approach to regional development which does not draw down on valuable water and land resources.

A poultry processing plant of the scale described in this DA shows no recognition of its draw down on water and raises considerable concern about its long term impact on the profile of regional agriculture.

Mining and construction are also local industries that are integrating clean energy into operations and offsetting their high carbon footprint with a range of energy efficiency measures. They are taking seriously doing business properly in the 21st century.

3. Social impacts.

Not every job is a good job:

TGG reads with concern the fact that the plant will operate continuously year round. Promises made about jobs may or may not eventuate, but it is clear that such jobs are unlikely to be good for individual workers in the long term and turnover may be high.

Studies in the US and Canada highlight the correlation between slaughterhouse work, domestic violence, substance abuse and depression. To slaughter animals daily, workers have to desensitise to violence and this can lower the threshold for violence beyond the work situation. Family violence rates in regional areas are already too high and it is foolish to disregard the nature of work and its impact on social wellbeing.

Welfare of children:

TGG is very concerned about the proposal for a 62 place childcare centre on site. If parents in the community were asked if they would choose to place their children in a centre adjacent to an abattoir most people would find this abhorrent. Does this also mean that young children will be in child care during night shifts and then come home with parents who need to sleep or will they then go into day care? NSW Planning needs to have a very close look at this aspect of the proposal as it raises significant issues in relation to children's rights. TGG believes that the proponent shows a significant disregard for the welfare of children and their families.

It is our contention that it is unlikely that people could work in such jobs long term without considerable impacts on their mental health and wellbeing and that of their families.

Regional image

Council, business and community associations have spent a decade investing in a brand strategy to make Goulburn a destination for visitors, business and new residents. Liveability is crucial component and collaborative leadership has been undertaken by Council, business and community associations in recent years to build infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing: eg walking and cycling trails, wetlands restoration, enhanced parks and gardens, street tree planting as well as sustainable resource management such as water sensitive developments, waste management projects, community solar projects and CBD upgrades.

The collaborative work to secure a rail trail between Goulburn and Crookwell is part of this strategy and when secured, is likely to boost the city's economic fortunes. The proposal for a poultry slaughter house within the city goes counter to this vision for the region.

4. White elephant – developer interests

The proposed site has been the subject of a range of negative proposals over the years. Is it the case that the owners are once again trying to dispose of a site that has proven to be a white elephant – bought at considerable cost and now worth much less? "Any proposal will do so long as we can get rid of it"!

5. Ambit claim

TGG has watched development applications come and go in this region over the last decade. A number of large scale developments with significant negative social and environmental impacts have been approved initially in very scaled down form and later expanded through modifications. This current proposal appears to be so extreme in size, promises and resource profile that the community proponent's aim is to secure an approval for a smaller operation as a "foot in the door", with the intention to expand later.

TGG asks NSW Planning to take a serious look at this proposal and its potential to impact negatively on this region for decades to come. Water is a major issue but not the only one. There are also significant social wellbeing concerns as well as the impact on the region's image as a destination hotspot for visitors, families and sustainable industry. The potential to reduce the region's resilience as a diverse economy.

Doug Rawlinson
President TGG

