

I object to the proposed Walla Walla Solar Farm:

At a public meeting in Wagga Wagga on July 3rd 2019 the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment produced a map highlighting the Hay Plains as an ideally situated and suitable site for a large scale solar farm facility. An electricity grid connection between Wagga Wagga and Adelaide connected into the Sydney /Melbourne transmission grid will traverse the Hay Plains Solar Farm. If this was developed, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide would all be connected to the Hay Plains solar farm. This would enable the transfer of power at any time between these cities including the power from the Snowy 2 proposal. This is a more suitable solution as this proposal does not impact prime agricultural land or communities.

INABILITY TO MAINTAIN SOIL OR PASTURES:

The development of the Walla Walla Solar Farm covering 605 hectares with solar panels and associated infrastructure will limit future cultivation, fertilisation and pasture seeding of the land. This will result in the continued denigration of the land eliminating the potential for sheep grazing.

If this land is covered with 900 000 solar panels and sheep are grazing under and around the panels, over a period of time without the ability to plough and re-sow, the soil will be compacted by sheep hooves. This will increase water run-off and reduce the ability for pasture regrowth resulting in weed growth and dust generation.

WEED CONTROL:

To prevent fire hazards, it will be necessary to spray herbicides under and around all the solar panels (605 hectares). This eradication of weeds will generate a potentially massive dust bowl and present a danger to nearby residents and crops when herbicides are sprayed.

POISONING OF CREEK WATER:

The use of herbicides to continually control weeds could result in a build-up and saturation of the soil with these chemicals. During periods of heavy rain the resulting leaching of the soil and run off may cause chemical pollution of water courses on this land polluting Back Creek. Back Creek flows into Billabong Creek which flows through farming communities eg: Walbundrie and Rand. How will this be prevented?

FOREIGN CONTROL OF AUSTRALIAS ELECTRICITY SUPPLY:

This solar farm similar to the other three proposed in the same area is owned by foreign entities who at any time can on-sell them to other foreign companies. If this practice continues the control of the majority of Australia's power supply in the future could easily be controlled by a hostile foreign country/countries. What controls are in place to protect Australia in this scenario?

“SOLAR FARMS GENERATE EXTRA EMPLOYMENT”- MISCONCEPTION:

Solar farms cause the unemployment of farm workers who are usually part of the local community. There are less people needed to maintain a solar farm than the specialist farm employees required to run a diversified farm (eg: hay contractors, shearers, stock agents, agronomists, fertiliser distributors)

If the proposed Walla Walla solar farm is developed on prime agricultural land (an area in excess of 600 hectares) the landscape will change from picturesque agricultural land to that of an industrial site. Property values will be lowered and no compensation is offered to affected residents.

MICROCLIMATE:

The large area of solar panels will generate an increase in summer temperatures. In 2019 a temperature of 47 degrees Celsius was recorded in this area. This extremely high temperature, together with the extra heat generated from the proposed solar farms, could result in a temperature in excess of 50 degrees Celsius in the shade. This would cause the burning of plant foliage and make living in the area very uncomfortable. The prolonged and extensive use of air-conditioning systems to counteract this abnormal increase in temperature would outweigh any possible advantage of the solar farm in off-setting global warming/climate change.

UNSIGHTLY INFRASTRUCTURE:

If the proposed Walla Walla solar farm is developed on prime agricultural land (an area in excess of 600 hectares) the landscape will dramatically change from picturesque agricultural land to that of an industrial site. As this area is visible from the Olympic Highway there is a potential for glare and distraction of drivers leading to possible car accidents.

It is presumed shipping containers or similar will be used to house batteries for the solar farm. No information has been forthcoming as to the colour, size and location of these units and how these will impact the landscape. The colour should blend in with the surrounding environment or be similar in colour to the panels.

FOLLOW UP OF CONDITIONS IMPOSED:

If the solar farm is approved, what processes does the department have in place to enforce any conditions imposed on the developers during development and in the future eg: maintenance and replacement of screening vegetation/ removal of the infrastructure?

The Company developing the site is foreign owned. There is nothing to stop it on-selling to another foreign company, who then, may not comply with the original conditions. We have been assured the land owner will be responsible if the company does not reinstate the land to its original condition. However in thirty years' time the original landowner may not own the property on which the solar farm exists or have the finances to comply with the original conditions.

FENCING AND SCREENING:

There have been suggestions that the area will be screened by suitable vegetation but the details of this are not transparent. It takes many years for such planting to be effective. Will the residents be properly informed of what vegetation will be used and how long this will take to effectively block the unsightly view of solar panels?

WATER REQUIREMENTS:

The solar farm requires a significant amount of water in the construction phase and when operating as a solar farm. Where does this water come from? Is there any provision for fire-fighting purposes on the proposed solar farm?

Any large commercial development of this size, even though it is considered a solar farm, would require adequate firefighting provisions to be installed within its boundaries. This is necessary for the protection of the solar farm and to prevent the spread of fire to neighbouring properties.

Any road access which would be available to bushfire brigades in the event of a fire should be constructed and maintained in accordance with the relevant Australian Standards (to carry the weight of fire-fighting appliances).

INSURANCE COST INCREASE FOR RESIDENTS:

If a fire breaks out on neighbouring property and damages the solar plant how does the resident ensure their insurance policy will cover this? It is likely that insurance policies will increase dramatically for nearby residents.

BIRD LIFE/ CONSERVATION OF HABITAT AND SPECIES:

Species diversity and habitat will be destroyed by the clearing of mature trees and vegetation.

DURING CONSTRUCTION:

Local residents will be adversely affected by dust, noise and traffic movement. There will be a large number of trucks driving down local dirt roads during the construction. Will local councils be reimbursed for this and roads maintained/repared immediately damage occurs? During construction we have been informed that the noise level of installation is well over acceptable levels of noise pollution set down by the Environmental Protection Authority.

The above points raised should be sufficient to prevent the approval of this solar farm.