

As landowners for the proposed development we are of course supporters of the solar farm.

For the best part of it, objectors have kept the debate impersonable so I shall endeavour to keep my submission respectful, particularly as we have family friends whom I understand are objecting to a different solar farm in the district, however this will be the first time I have publicly commented and it will most likely be the last so I need to highlight some points which for the sake of the democratic process, ought to be on record.

Signing to a company was not a decision taken lightly. We didn't inherit a farm, we took risks and worked hard. That is not to cast dispersions on others, that is simply our story. 14 years ago we were unable to afford the entire initial 1300 acre holding of "Roseville" but some months after it failed at auction (because the district considered it too marginal) we were able to negotiate vendor terms securing 700 acres with the house and leasing the other 600 acres for 5 years with an option to buy. During those 5 years while working full time in town we were able to sell down some investment property and be in a position to take up the option. In this time, we also secured another 1000 acres immediately North of us in 2 parcels – the majority of which had been on the market for over 2 years and had failed at 2 auctions (without a bid). My wife and I bought it by private treaty after the second failed auction. In comparison to land values at that time the price was modest and reflective of how marginal these paddocks are. These second 2 parcels of land form the majority contribution to the solar farm.

We currently have 2 companies that share-farm our cropping enterprise across our entire holding. Long before there was any talk of solar farms these 2 companies were offered the entire 1000 acres of the subject land to crop but declined, citing the country was too risky. I employ these companies on a contract basis to crop the best 335 acres of it where I carry the risk of low yields and the rest is sown to clover and rye for grazing sheep and cattle.

On the land offered to FRV for a solar farm we have retained grazing rights for sheep. This is not only a matter of fact it is a matter of contract as this was negotiated in our lease. Sheep grazing co-existing with solar farms is evident across Australia and across the world on operational sites.

Should the solar farm go ahead, instead of running sheep and cattle across the whole farm, sheep will be grazed on one side (within the solar farm) while cattle will be grazed on the other - on the original "Roseville" holding retained for traditional agriculture where we will continue to live. Incidentally, when people say "grazing under solar panels" I don't think they appreciate the rows of panels are spread some 8 to 14 metres apart and the physical footprint of the projects infrastructure is only 14.93% of the land – and this is a generous calculation allowing for 1 metre each side of the upright post of each panel, so in reality this percentage will be much lower.

Our stock numbers of cattle and sheep won't reduce which keeps the supply chain intact at all levels of service from shearers; transport; agents through to yard fees. I can still spray / fertilise under the panels if I wish to undertake weed prevention or fertilise pastures.

In terms of 'cropping land' viewed to be lost we have offered more land on the other side of the farm to the 2 share-farming companies we work with. This is marginal and underutilised country which we have spent considerable money improving the soil with generous Gypsum and Lime applications to ensure our overall cropping output remains unchanged – actually it has slightly

increased. We would not have had the confidence to spend the money improving this land without a potential solar farm in consideration. This will mean the 335 acres currently cropped on solar land will be sown to clover and rye to increase sheep numbers in the solar farm. The washup is our overall agricultural position will improve.

Having stated all of the above the notion of having to justify the continued agricultural output of our farm is a furphy. It has been an interesting process in that perfect strangers from miles away under no threat of aesthetic intrusion seem to think they have a vested interest in what we do on our own land, not to mention an expectation that we are duty bound to contribute to this nation's food bowl. I could lock this farm up for the next 5 years or turn it into a wildlife refuge and no-one would batter an eyelid. Not one person would be on the doorstep telling me I have a moral obligation to feed the country. In any given district there will always be some farmers that have never stretched a wire, drenched a steer or turned off a fat lamb - time could be better spent educating these farmers how to become more productive if there is a true belief that this area is the saviour of the food bowl. Needless to say this would never happen as it is nobody else's business what a farmer does with his/her land.

I knew little of solar farms when we were first approached by a company in 2018 so I took the time to educate myself and travelled to Longreach QLD to speak with a landowner of such a project. I also invested time researching the solar farm at Coleambally. On both occasions I was seeking 'warts and all' information and it became obvious very quickly that there was no down side to solar. It was clear to see that solar farms are a safe, quiet and low-lying technology which provides clean renewable energy, which supports our energy supply and combats climate change while also injecting economic revenue into communities. In these areas I researched, any bitterness of a discontented few was dwarfed by the economic injection that these country towns have enjoyed, as was shown on ABC's Landline recently where the program highlighted how solar farms are saving country towns. Since my first introduction to the Longreach solar farm we have seen many in our travels through NSW and QLD and in all areas the theme runs true – There are initially objectors doing their best to sway an apathetic many while supporters offer support quietly without having to show their hands in a small town. Once the project gains traction the benefits are clear for all and the growing support is overwhelming.

On the subject of objectors, I don't believe the level of objection for this project is accurate in that we currently have 4 different companies looking to develop 4 potential solar farms in this shire. While this surely must make us the envy of all other municipalities, objectors have teamed up to loan support of each project.

In my opinion there were only 3 families I needed to consult prior to signing as 2 will see the farm from their homes and 1 has rental property in close proximity. I approached all 3 families prior to signing and all 3 said they wouldn't object (I have written correspondence from one of those neighbours, "Orange Grove" supporting this statement should the Department wish to view it). Following this, in good faith and clear conscience we committed to the lease option. Many months later it was quite a shock for us to receive a letter box mail out from "Orange Grove" which saturated the district and went to great lengths to describe how their wedding reception venue, (notwithstanding has numerous vantage points) like to take photos of our back paddock (the closest boundary of which is over 800 metres away) – particularly of our flowering canola which happens for

roughly only 1 month every second year. This was the very first moment that we were aware there was any discontent. I'm not sure how to respond to this objection – the notion that they have claimed some sort of ownership over a view of land of which they are not paying the rates (or mortgage) seems absurd.

The image which was provided by “Orange Grove” to our community on how the solar farm would be viewed in the landscape was completely inaccurate and caused unnecessary concern. A true visual of the before and after view from the “Orange Grove” is included in the EIS and can be seen below;



a) Existing undeveloped view



b) Infrastructure superimposed (prior to screening)

The image b) is a worst-case scenario and is not including the extensive 50m wide vegetation buffer which the developer has provided to the “Orange Grove”. I know the developer has been extremely accommodating to my neighbours and made a lot of changes to the design to project their views.

I have full respect for the 2 neighbours who called me to let me know that they had changed their position and were joining the movement to stop the solar farm. My response to that was a cordial exchange “we are all just trying to do the best we can for our families, if you feel what you are doing is the best for yours then do what you need to”. I will note that I am aware that at least one neighbour had discussed contributing land to the solar project and some of the discontent may be a result of failed negotiations.

In relation to other objectors in the broader district nearly all have said to me either in private or publicly that if they were given the same opportunity, they would jump at it – but as they are missing out, they don't want it here. This particular objection is also a common theme in all other solar farms we have researched in QLD and NSW.

I'm not sure where many negative myths about solar have originated but they have been perpetuated locally by a passionate few who's negative view has crystallised in others reluctant to invest time or energy in researching the topic. I'm aware however other parties who were canvassed for negative submissions took the time to educate themselves about solar and have ultimately become supporters. We appreciate their contact.

Let me address the biggest myth, that this is prime agricultural land. Despite gaining traction this assertion is factually flawed. The land is rated predominantly 4 with some 6. For factual clarity, Prime Agricultural Land is rated 1- 3. This is good land but hardly prime. It is dry land farming who's land prices are propped up by being located in the growth corridor of Australia's greatest in-land city. In the case of "Orange Grove" I think it is a bit rich that on one hand they describe our area as prime but on the other insist that a neighbouring solar farm will affect their source of a secondary income they view as needed to survive. Having established their 'Eco-Lodges', with the potential for 100% tenancy over the next 2 years, it would be easily assumed "Orange Grove" actually would have been supporters of our development, particularly if they were truly champions of renewables.

Another neighbour contracts his services and the third has a part time job as groundskeeper of our local school and who's wife works part time at our local coffee shop. My point is, we all need to diversify or expand to survive – this land is not prime. We are pleased to have another average cropping season while a lot of our country is experiencing some of the worst droughts on record, however it should be noted that this area is not immune and has been hit heavily before, in particular the severe droughts of 2006 and inevitably we will be hit again.

I'll also note development of some kind is inevitable. This property under its current zoning enjoys the benefit of another 3 building permits. At some stage there will be a house or houses on the land of which "Orange Grove" likes to take photos. No doubt with the passage of time development will be more common place. I believe dual use 'agri-solar' is perfect for this land and I believe the development has been perfectly located and designed. Its symmetry is aesthetically pleasing, and the area already hosts existing man-made development/industry (electricity pylons, Olympic Highway and Boral's blue metal quarry).

In an economic climate where Australia has been described as being in a 'production recession' we have a company with a proven track record wanting to spend nearly \$400 million on a development in our area and bring up to 250 construction workers for 2 years who will be looking for smoko, meals and accommodation everyday followed by 21 full time equivalent workers for the 30 year operational phase. From existing operational solar farms, it is evident that a proportion of these workers will have families wanting to move to our area and support our local schools.

If not for this development I'm curious what our local council think they have up their sleeve. What other project is coming to town that will contribute so heavily to community programs and to help alleviate councils burden if not for solar farms? What other economic measures does council have up their sleeve that will stimulate activity across so many business sectors? We were pleased the mayor of our shire, the previous mayor and another councillor could see the benefits in our project. Overall, I would like to know what is planned in our region as an alternative way forward in a slowing economy?

We surely must be the envy not only by every other municipality but also that of so many struggling towns that we have in front of us an opportunity to insulate ourselves from an economic downturn.

In my view there are only 2 arguments that stand up in relation to not supporting solar, and they are perfectly fine arguments but let us not kid ourselves there is more to it than this. They are:

1. **We don't want to look at it next to us.** I acknowledge it will be a change of landscape and that is a perfectly fine argument, but seeing solar farms in the flesh alleviates many concerns and FRV have gone to great lengths to mitigate this concern, least of which is substantial tree screening (which dwarfs the small number of trees lost) and moving the substation (which would have been at considerable expense) to protect my neighbours views and provide a much greater tree screening area;
2. **We weren't offered a deal.** I can't apologise for this second argument. We didn't go looking for a solar farm deal it came to us and my wife and I will continue to make decisions based on the best interests of the 6 faces we look at around our dining table each night. Among all else trying to leave our planet in better shape for them also plays a major consideration.

I truly believe that if the Department were to canvas the area it would find much more support than objection. The Department would understand we live in a well acquainted country area and a lot of supporters don't want to raise their hand when businesses can't afford to alienate commerce with even a section of the community. I feel the area understands solar better now and the late rush in support has been heartfelt and overwhelming.

We are fond of our town and our community here at Walla where our 6 children are spread from St Pauls College, Walla Public to nearly kindergarten and I look forward to the benefits the solar farm could bring if approved to all within this community.