

**SSD 8183 Beryl Solar Farm
PAC Meeting 21/11/17
Presentation by Gulgong / Beryl Solar Farm Action Group**

Introduction: Good afternoon members of the NSW Planning Assessment Commission. My name is Gregory John Griffiths and I have been endorsed to speak on behalf of the Gulgong / Beryl Solar Farm Action Group so as to afford individual members the opportunity to speak, in more detail, on specific issues relevant to the proposal under consideration. We welcome you to Gulgong and appreciate this opportunity to formally state our concerns. Given the timing of this meeting some of the registered speakers may not be in a position to attend due to work commitments or unforeseen circumstances and, if time permits, I would respectfully request the opportunity to speak on specific issues that may not be able to be presented as a result prior to the close of this meeting.

For the remainder of this address the Gulgong / Beryl Solar Farm Action Group will be referred to by the abbreviated title "Action Group"

The Action Group was initially formed as a direct result of the local residents concerns as to the scope of the proposed large scale solar farm and the negative impacts the project would impose on the area. It then became obvious for the need to inform the wider community of the proposal given the overall lack of community awareness and understanding of this project and two public meetings were held to facilitate the information dissemination following the Action Groups formation. A lack of perception also became evident when individuals spoke at the May 2017 local Council meeting which resulted in the Council amending their initial response once they became fully aware of the actualities of the project.

Whilst the Commission must discount the emotional aspect of any presentation here today and base their determination on the facts and recommendations before them there has been, understandably, a considerable emotional toll imposed on those most affected since the full extent of the proposal became apparent and we ask that consideration be given as community members state their concerns to the Commission.

At this stage the Action Group would like to go on record to clearly state that the members are not opposed to the concept of renewable energy, despite increasing evidence as to the actual cost of such power generation, but are opposed to the inappropriate location selected and project size based entirely on providing the greatest financial return for the Proponent.

Address: Following the conclusion of the Submissions phase Department of Planning representatives attended several properties and spoke with the landowners to see first hand what the impacts of the proposal would have on the surrounding area. During these visits a strong impression was given that the proposal would not be supported and it is disappointing that Department is now recommending approval albeit with additional conditions designed to further mitigate some of the concerns raised. Following speakers will provide more detail on specific issues and how the assessment process has failed to address them with suitable adequacy.

It is considered that this proposal, if endorsed, will have a considerable and lasting negative impact not only for the immediate stakeholders but for the wider community given the close proximity to the town proper. The Action Group considers that the Proponents Submissions Response and, indeed their initial application, is fundamentally flawed with wording and terms included such as "possible, may and if practicable" allowed to remain without clarification, purposefully negating any accountability in those particular areas.

It is the Action Groups understanding that, whilst the Proponent will purchase the subject land at a price several times the current market value (an amount which presumably will likely be absorbed into the \$171m nominated project cost), the actual cost of the infrastructure will be funded by the taxpayer by way of various Government grants.

The fact that the proposal, whilst nominating a 87MWa capacity, does not guarantee an output return on that investment nor, it would appear, is there any accountability process in place for any lack of performance would appear to indicate a desire to reach a politically motivated renewable energy target rather than actually addressing the power supply issue (We are reminded that there is no proposal to store any of the energy created by this project) Interestingly in an area prone to airborne dust inundation the Proponent nominates approximately 1ltr per panel per year for cleaning purposes. It has been reported that solar panel efficiency in other State installations has been reduced considerably because of dust layering so without a regulated cleaning regime it is extremely doubtful that the power production capacity will ever be actually realised.

Whilst we understand and respect the terms of reference applied to this meeting, namely the Proponents submissions Response and Departments recommendation, the Action Group would also like to address the Supplementary Planning Report and accompanying documentation supplied by the Proponent (apparently directly) to the Commission last Friday, November 17th. Given the sudden and late timing of the report most here would not be aware of its content.

Firstly we would dispute the claim that this report is based on "A comprehensive site and locality inspection that was undertaken on the 13/11/17" given that both myself and the immediate property owners were present and no vehicular movements were noted on that day or subsequent days of that week. *WE WOULD ALSO OBJECT TO THE INCLUSION OF.*

This report seeks to influence the determination process by addressing one of the main issues of concern, namely the use of R5 zoned land as part of the proposal.

The so called "independent report" goes to considerable lengths in justifying the Proponents requirement to maintain the infrastructure on the R5 portion of land even suggesting that such infrastructure would provide a beneficial buffer zone between adjoining residential and agricultural activities.

Whilst the report makes a point of highlighting the amount of greenhouse gasses saved by the additional power generation emanating from the R5 portion it fails to disclose the amount of greenhouse gasses generated as a result of the manufacture and installation of the project infrastructure. As we are now aware wind farm turbines create more greenhouse gas as a result of their manufacture and installation than they save during their productive lifespan. Could a factual study into solar farm installations result in similar findings?

The report also states that the 1 in 5 inundation height of 500mm affecting the majority of the property will not affect the panel array given that they are installed on piers. The report

Now AUSTRALIAN BASED STUDIES BEING REFERRED TO IN SUPPORT OF THE PROponents RECOMMENDATIONS. WE WERE CLEARLY ADVISED THAT SUCH STUDIES WOULD NOT BE USED CONSIDERED, IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS.

then fails to mention the affect on the containers housing the invertors. If they are to be raised above the inundation level then their overall height is likely become much greater than that nominated in the proposal.

Prior to the Submissions phase the Proponent was requested to remove the R5 zoning portion of the proposal but responded that it would not be financially viable to do so. This explanation was contradictory to the fact that a number of smaller solar farms are in operation throughout the State highlighting the Proponents profit driven rationale rather than community considerations by the Proponent.

The Proponent continues to stress the benefits afforded to the community as a result of this proposal. Whilst the construction phase may deliver short term local employment prospects (although no specific details have been provided) and local materials supply (again no specific details are provided) the only long term localised benefit appear to be the creation of three full time site maintenance positions. All of which, as we understand, have already been allocated as part of the land purchase package

The Proponents suggestion that tourism to the area may benefit as people may wish to view a large scale solar farm is clearly contrary to the Proponents own attempts to downplay the visibility of the site from the surrounding public places including roads and the actual township.

Also there is now mention of a Community Fund to benefit the community. No details have been provided to inform the community of this item, nor it would appear, is there any actual requirement to proceed with this in any form.

Conclusion: In conclusion one can certainly argue that this proposal is a textbook example of sacrificing the rights of a few for the greater good (in terms of power supply at least) and this may well have been tolerated if there were no viable alternatives. Long time local residents can identify a number of sites within the Mid Western Regional area which would accommodate such infrastructure without adversely affecting the intrinsic values of the community, albeit with a reduced profit margin to the Proponent.

We feel that the Commission, in this instance, has the ability to protect a community that has chosen to forgo the conveniences of urban living in favour of the qualities afforded by a tranquil regional existence. An existence now under threat by corporate greed and not community benefit as the Proponent might suggest.

Whilst the Action Group would both desire and welcome the Commissions determination in the negative the harsh reality would appear to be otherwise. We can, therefore, only appeal to the Commission that, should the proposal is supported, all conditions recommended by the Department are upheld and enforced without compromise.

At the end of the day, if approved, the Vendor of the required proprties will walk away with a financial windfall, the Proponent will walk away with a handsome profit, the State will be left with an expensive and (apparently) unguaranteed form of power production and the affected community will be left to vigorously defend their right to retain the rural lifestyle which brought them to this area in the first place.

Again we thank you for your time and involvement in these proceedings and trust that any final decision will take into account what has been stated here today.