

APPENDIX D:

STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Section 79C(1) of the EP&A Act outlines the matters that a consent authority must take into consideration when determining development applications. These matters could be summarised as:

- the provisions of environmental planning instruments (including draft instruments), development control plans, planning agreements, and the EP&A Regulations;
- the impacts of the development;
- the suitability of the site;
- any submissions; and
- the public interest.

Section 5 of the EP&A Act also outlines a range of objects that must be considered when making decisions under the EP&A Act, and Sections 5A to 5D further outline provisions to be considered with regard to threatened species (including species, populations and ecological communities) and their habitats. The Department has given consideration to the requirements of other provisions of Sections 5A to 5D. In particular, these matters include the:

- factors in Section 5A(2), known as the '7 part test of significance';
- threatened species assessment guidelines¹ identified in Section 5A(1); and
- register of critical habitat as identified in Section 5B.

The Department has considered all of these matters in its assessment of the project and in summary considers that:

- the project can be undertaken in a manner that is consistent with the aims, objectives and provisions of the applicable environmental planning instruments, other applicable planning documents and the EP&A Regulations (see **Appendix C**);
- the project could be undertaken in a manner that is generally consistent with the objects of the EP&A Act;
- the potential impacts of the project on the site and surrounds has been carefully considered in the assessment of the project, and the Department is satisfied that the impacts of the project on the environment and the local community could be adequately minimised, managed, or at least compensated for, to an acceptable standard;
- apart from that portion of the project on land zoned R5 – Large Lot Residential, the site is suitable for the project, as it is within a region recognised as having some of the best solar resources in NSW, and has access to existing electricity distribution networks. The operation of the project on land zoned RU1 – Primary Production would also not compromise the long-term use of the land for agricultural purposes; and
- whilst there is some opposition to the project from local landowners and special interest groups, the project is in the wider public interest, particularly as it would:
 - be consistent with the NSW Government's vision for a secure, reliable, affordable and clean energy future for the state;
 - assist in meeting Australia's renewable energy target as well as future electricity demands without the production of additional greenhouse gases; and
 - facilitate employment for up to 150 personnel during construction and 3 personnel during operations.

Objects of the EP&A Act

The Minister must consider the objects of the EP&A Act when making decisions under the Act. The objects of most relevance to the Minister's decision on whether or not to approve the project are found in Section 5(a)(i),(ii),(vi) and (vii). They are:

¹ *Threatened Species Assessment Guidelines – The Assessment of Significance*, prepared by the then Department of Environment and Climate Change, dated August 2007.

To encourage:

- (i) *the proper management, development and conservation of natural and artificial resources, including agricultural land, natural areas, forests, minerals, water, cities, towns and villages for the purpose of promoting the social and economic welfare of the community and a better environment;*
- (ii) *the promotion and co-ordination of the orderly and economic use and development of land;*
- (vi) *the protection of the environment, including the protection and conservation of native animals and plants, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities, and their habitats; and*
- (vii) *ecologically sustainable development.*

The Department is satisfied that the project encourages the proper development of natural resources (Object 5(a)(i)) and the promotion of orderly and economic use of land (Object 5(a)(ii)), particularly as the project is:

- a permissible land use on that portion of the project site zoned RU1 - Primary Production;
- located in a logical location for efficient solar energy development;
- able to be managed such that the impacts of the project could be adequately minimised, managed, or at least compensated for, to an acceptable standard; and
- consistent with the goals of the *Renewable Energy Action Plan*, and would assist in meeting Australia's renewable energy targets whilst reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Consideration of environmental protection (Object 5(a)(vi)) is provided in **section 5** of this report. Following its consideration, the Department considers that the project is able to be undertaken in a manner that would improve or at least maintain the biodiversity values of the locality over the medium to long term, and would not significantly impact threatened species and ecological communities of the locality. The Department is also satisfied that any residual biodiversity impacts can be managed and/or mitigated by imposing appropriate conditions and retiring the required biodiversity offset credits.

The Department has considered the encouragement of ESD (Object 5(a)(vii)) in its assessment of the project. This assessment integrates all significant socio-economic and environmental considerations and seeks to avoid any potential serious or irreversible environmental damage, based on an assessment of risk-weighted consequences. The Applicant has also considered the project against the principles of ESD. Following its consideration, the Department considers that the project can be carried out in a manner that is consistent with the principles of ESD.