

MR A. HUTTON: Good morning, everybody. I might just get you to take your seats, please. And there's just – there's tea and coffee at the back if you want to avail yourself of those facilities as well. So good morning, everybody. Thanks for coming along. Before we begin I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the
5 land on which we meet and I'd also like to pay my respects to their elders past and present, and to elders from other communities who may be here today. Welcome to this public meeting on the development application of SSD8658 in relation to the Gunnedah solar farm from Gunnedah Solar Farm Proprietary Limited, who are the applicant, who propose to develop a new 150 megawatt solar farm approximately
10 nine kilometres north-east of Gunnedah, within the local government area.

My name is Andrew Hutton and I am the chair of the Independent Planning Commission panel today, which has been appointed to help determine the proposal. Joining me are my fellow commissioners Tony Pearson and Annelise Tuor, and
15 Alana Jelfs and David Koppers from the Commission Secretariat. Before I continue I should state that all appointed commissioners make an annual declaration of interest identifying potential conflicts with their appointed roles. And, for the record, we are unaware of any conflicts in relation to our determination of this particular proposal. You can find some additional information in the way we manage our
20 potential conflicts in our policy paper, which is available on the IPC website.

In the interests of openness and transparency today's meeting is being recorded and a full transcript will be produced and also made available on the commission's website. Okay. So the purpose of the meeting, this is really a meeting that gives – is
25 a public meeting with the opportunity for us to hear your views on the assessment report that has been prepared by the Department of Planning and Environment before we make a determination on the development application. The Independent Planning Commission of New South Wales was established by the New South Wales on 1 March 2018 as an independent statutory body operating separately to the Department
30 of Planning and Environment.

The commission plays an important role in strengthening the transparency and independence in decision-making processes for major developments and land-use planning within the state of New South Wales. So where are we in the process? Just
35 to give you a bit of an update, this meeting is one part of our decision-making process. We've also been briefed by the department and have met with the proponent, and intend to carry out a site inspection tomorrow morning as well so we get a better sense of the lay of the land. After today's meeting we may convene meetings with relevant stakeholders if we need to clarify anything or seek additional
40 information on matters that get raised over the coming days, and transcripts of all these meetings will also be published on the IPC website.

The next steps, then, are, following today's meeting we will endeavour to determine the application as soon as possible. However, there could be delays if we need to go
45 and seek any additional information, so we just make you aware of that. Before we hear from the first registered speaker I just wanted to go over a couple of ground

rules and lay down some ground rules that we expect everybody taking part in today's meeting to follow. Firstly, today's meeting is not a debate. Our panel will not take questions from the floor and no interjections will be allowed. We ask you to adhere to that. Our aim is to provide the maximum opportunity for people to speak and be heard by the panel. Public speaking is an ordeal for many people. It's not easy.

So – and you may not agree with everything that you hear today, but every speaker has the right to be treated equally and respect – with respect and heard in silence, so I just ask you to acknowledge that. Today's focus is about public consultation. Our panel is here to listen, not necessarily to comment. But we may ask questions of clarification, but this is usually unnecessary. And it will be most beneficial if, during your presentation, you could really focus on the issues that concern you. We really want to hear about those issues. It's very important that everybody registered to speak receives a fair share of the time available and I will enforce timekeeping rules based on the allocated times upon your registration or speaker's registration.

As the chair, I do reserve the right to allow additional time for provision of further technical matters, but just as notification a warning bell will sound at one minute to go and then a second bell when your time runs out. So I do ask that you respect these time limits so that everyone gets an opportunity to speak today. If you'd like to project something on the screen I just would ask that you bring your presentation up to the secretariat so that we can get that up before your presentation, if you haven't already done so. And if you have a copy of your presentation, we'd certainly appreciate it if you could make that copy of that presentation available to the secretariat after you speak. We do definitely take the time to not only listen, but read through those presentations as submitted.

Please note that any information given to us may be made public, and the commission's privacy statement governs our approach on your information. That's available on the website or you can approach the secretariat to get a copy. Okay. Audio recording of the meeting is not allowed, except for the official recording of it for transcript purposes. And any notes that we make during the day on the issues that arose will be summarised up in our determination report, which will be made available. Finally, just to make sure that everyone's got mobile phones at least on silent or turned off, just so that we avoid disruptions. And I think, without any further ado, I'll call the first speaker to come up to the podium. So I'll please call up Geoff Hood, who's been allocated 10 minutes.

MR G. HOOD: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Test one, two. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and to Messrs Tuor, Hutton and Pearson, welcome to Gunnedah. According to our local government body, Gunnedah Shire is a land of opportunity and Gunnedah is the koala capital of the world. However, I wish to speak in relation to three issues with the Gunnedah solar farm. They are flooding, Rural Fire Brigade and Landcare. With flooding, I draw on my experience as a present farmer and landholder on three farms near Gunnedah, north of the Namoi River. I've previously been a farm manager/contractor on the

property Myalla, where the proposed solar farm is to be located. Please note, you've also got some speaker notes there and maps.

5 Around 2002, together with several landholders, selected representatives, we explored and commissioned the comprehensive Carroll to Boggabri Floodplain Management Plan, which went through to 2006, with substantial compendium of data and reports. This plan and data in 2018 has substantially been referred to by this project's consultants, the consultants of a similar solar farm development, Orange Grove Sun Farm, and also the recent Whitehaven Coal Vickery Extension Project and rail loop. President – I'm deputy captain of Gundigal Rural Fire Service, the former chairperson of Gundigal Landcare Group, which was Nobby Rock Landcare Group, as well as an agricultural contractor across many farms surrounding the proposed development.

15 In relation to the flooding, Gunnedah solar farm, you'll see on your map there when you've got time, there's a red soil ridge that runs through the centre of the floodplain north-east of Gunnedah, out to across the bridge. Maps are provided on page 15 and page 17. The proposed Gunnedah solar farm has selected some of the area of red soil ridge which is in the one per cent, one in a 100 average recurrence interval flooding area, which is shown as area A. The development has, at the same time, taken into 20 the proposed footprint lower country on the southern end down near the Orange Grove Road, which is near the Namoi River. It's chocolate soil. It's more flood-prone land, and is also adjacent to a high-velocity breakout area from the Namoi River itself, an area more subject to flooding than the lighter red soil in the 10 per cent average recurrent interval range.

There can be a succession of smaller floods in this area, which is shown as area B. The proponent consultants in the first instance, when they came to this site – to that location a year ago had a concept and design that was totally inappropriate from a floodplain-planning perspective, which indicated that the consultants were 30 inexperienced or incompetent. This was not a good start and it got a lot of people offside. On from this inappropriate first design, note that 50 per cent of the recent public submissions had "flooding issues". We're now on version 5 design, with a third proposed footprint, a total security perimeter fence some of which is a drop-down fence. No design of a drop-down security fence has been provided to the 35 community – to the people in this room.

If this proposed development is to be approved, then there has to be a certainty that the drop-down fence will work. A security fence, by nature, is secure, so where is 40 the design? The drop-down fence in area A, which is a red soil area, and area B, definitely need to work, every time. Area B is an often-flooded zone. Otherwise the proposed development, if it doesn't work, will be a non-complying floodplain development. I've included a picture in your material of a drop-down steel fence structure that is in a floodplain on one of our farms. The steel centre triangle is on 45 the bottom steel hinges. The centre frame can be pushed over by hand. It is only held up by light tie wire. This is not a security fence.

5 A drop-down security fence needs to fall down first up in a flood event. In other words, failsafe open. But, note, the properties are usually inaccessible in flood events and this can happen in the middle of the night. A failsafe open type of drop-down fence would need to be inspected annually by local government or state water type of personnel to ensure compliance. No good having a drop-down fence if the hinges have been welded up several years ago. Area B proposed drop-down fence, which is the area down near the – on the – near the Namoi, would be utilised quite often; area A, maybe once in every hundred years.

10 If it is found that a drop-down security fence is inappropriate for the area being floodplain location pre-approval or, at a later stage, then an option – and I note that it's in the special conditions – would be to have a no-development refresh of the design – a no – no-security fence floodway through the proposed development footprint, in an area which is shown on the map as 5(a)/5(b). The width to be
15 modelled, let's say 40 metres wide of a floodway. Drainage – in the area on the west in the proposed development, shown as 8(a) in figure 4 on page 15, it would be appropriate if a small section of proposed drop-down fence configuration could be set back off the boundary fence alignment at least 50 metres, to allow for unhindered drainage of residual drainage flows from around the development.

20 This is near the property Warrawee. This area is swampy for a reason. Water does lay. This would ensure the development is compliant with the Carroll to Boggabri Floodplain Management Plan's complying works criteria. Setback of structures from boundary is noted as 100 metres, but 50 metres in this area would be sufficient. So,
25 in summary, if the solar farm did not have a perimeter security fence, then many of the flooding objectors would have no problem with the concept. Design 5 as presented appears to be compliant with floodplain plan. However, drop-down fence sections as proposed would have to work failsafe – open. If there is a problem, then some of the development should be enforced to be removed from the floodplain.

30 So I'll now move on to the Rural Fire Service and other things. Note is made of the development consent, special conditions, with hazards and there's a lot of conditions there with the Rural Fire Brigade. But it's also suggested that members of staff of
35 the proposed Gunnedah solar farm become members of Gundigal Rural Fire Brigade, undertake skills training to at least basic firefighter or advanced firefighter, so as to have competency, should the need arise on adjoining lands. Gundigal Rural Fire Service has been called to lightning strikes on Myalla and adjoining lands previous. It is noted that – then I'll move on to Landcare. It is noted that a vegetation buffered landscape screen is an essential part of this development.

40 Also there are two areas of remnant vegetation that are going to be linked. As a suggestion, it would be a golden opportunity for environmental stewardship and community enhancement if a bold step could be undertaken by the developer,
45 adjoining landholders and local planning services and Landcare to create a vegetation corridor that would join the Kelvin Hills, the Melville Range to the Namoi River. The building blocks are there to create a koala-friendly plantation to link existing plantings and remnant trees, part of Myalla leading from the Melville Range right

across Dutchey Lane across the remnant vegetation through the proposed solar farm, landscape screens, across Myalla to the Kelvin – that should have been the Orange Grove Road and then Crown land down to the Namoi River.

5 An example of what could be achieved – and if you’re going for a drive tomorrow – is the vegetation plantings along the Orange Grove Road in the vicinity of Daisy Lane. Trees that are not planted too thick, planted by Nobby Rock Landcare Group some time back are very impressive now. Gunnedah Shire has been granted six and a half million dollars for a koala tourist centre park. I’m sure that funding could be
10 obtained to help this type of landscape community the solar farm could do their bit as an essential part of the development if funding for the balance could be obtained. Thank you for your time and I will present these maps to your - - -

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Hood. Just to clarify the comment you made
15 around Kelvin Road, that’s Orange Grove Road - - -

MR HOOD: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Just to clarify. Yes. I will just make note of that here so we get that
20 right.

MR HOOD: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thanks, Mr Hood. Thank you. Okay. I will call the next speaker,
25 Chris Avar, who has been allocated three minutes to speak.

MR C. AVARD: Did you leave this on, Geoff? Can you hear me up there? All
right. Thank you for the time to speak today. I’m sure the commission have read my
30 initial submission upon application of the project. And I just want to respond to some of the proponent’s responses to the submission in their more recent document. Now, more experienced and knowledgeable people are going to talk to you today about floods and their impacts and there certainly are plenty of people to the south of this project who will be – who are significantly impacted.

35 But I want to speak more on behalf collectively of a few neighbours to the north. We live in elevated positions to the north of the project, essentially looking down over it. And these concerns were raised in the submission, those that I’m going to speak about primarily are visual impact and the value on our properties. If I could draw your attention to Photon’s most recent documents regarding the project, specifically
40 table 4.7, and run all the way down to page 61, starting at the bottom of 61 running through to 62. And their response to my visual concerns are that – read as such:

45 *The solar farm is not located on elevated land that is prominent within the landscape. The solar farm is set back at least 800 metres from the nearest receivers and solar panels will have a maximum height of three metres. As such, it will not be a visually prominent feature within the landscape in terms of height.*

Now, that's all well and good. Sure, a three metre high construction from 800 metres away appears very diminished but I'm going to suggest that it's not the vertical height of the project that concerns us from our elevated position but rather the other dimensions. The 304 hectares which the most recent plan covers and for those of us that speak in the old money that's about 750 acres which is a significant footprint. And, look, mentioning – I mean, the fact that the project is on flat land, it has no bearing on our aspect. In fact, it's a negative – a negative factor as far as we're concerned. The proponent go on to say that:

10 *The project will be a visible feature. However, this will appear as a feature of low height –*

really –

15 *comprised of large geometric shapes and repetitive rows, elementally similar in form to large mature crops viewed at similar distance but different in colour.*

Now, that's to say the 304 hectares of what could be cotton, sorghum, wheat, brilliant yellow canola, it's going to be replaced with 304 hectares of steel and glass. And to suggest that it's similar to mature crops is drawing a long bow by anyone's imagination. In terms of property value, on page 64 and continuing on to 65:

25 *The impacts of a solar farm on neighbouring property values has not been studied in depth, however, there have been numerous studies on the impacts of wind generation on neighbouring properties in the United States mentioned on Hoen and others report, 2010. These studies found the impact of wind energy generation on neighbouring properties –*

I guess that's me. Anyway, in summation I don't think a study in Massachusetts on wind farms in urban areas is relevant to a 305 hectare solar farm as viewed from an elevated position in Gunnedah, New South Wales.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Did you have a copy of your presentation you wanted to - - -

MR AVARD: I can email it to you, sir.

MR HUTTON: - - - email through. I just don't want to miss any of those key points.

MR AVARD: No. That's all right. Thanks. I'm nearly done, Graeme.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Look, I'm quite happy if you just want to continue and just finalise your presentation, I think that's fair. Thank you.

MR AVARD: Well, just briefly – thank Graeme. Just briefly, look, the relevance of a wind turbine study conducted in America during periods of record price falling

full year. There has been no offer from Photon to provide alternate accommodation for any impact – any residents impacted by noise and as I am aware this has happened in other projects. It will be very stress for family members that are home all day.

5

Now, I want to get onto flooding and I think it's ironic that you had to drive up from Sydney yesterday with the amount of rain that was had and so if that amount of rain had actually fallen here yesterday we would have been in a flood situation that we're going to talk about today. So it's – all floods cause grief. So on page 14 of the document it says:

10

There are no natural waterways on the site.

Now, the Carroll to Boggabri Flood Study clearly shows a major discharge from the Namoi River on Galton's property which heads straight through the proposed solar farm. If I could have that first slide? Yes. Thank you. This is out of the 1955 flood and you can see there there's a blue line and there's a green line, and that green line is the – where the water is coming out of Galtons, and the blue line is where the Namoi River continues on. So just leave that there for a moment. pitt&sherry have, I think, reluctantly tried to address the flooding issue.

15

20

They didn't – they had their head in the sand for quite a long time, and really didn't really want to address it. But we have seen some improvements in the proposal. The fence area has been moved back a little bit and there's now talk of flood fences. But these adjustments are welcome, but it is an admission that there is a significant problem with flooding, and I do not believe that even yet they have a real understanding of the volume and speed of the discharge from the river, the size of which we hope to show the panel when you come out there tomorrow. So just interestingly enough, with this – with those, there's more water travelling out across that solar farm site than remains in the river.

25

30

So you can't see it from here, but there's 1,276,000 litres per second passing over the farm, and there's only 1,240,000 litres remaining in the river. So it is a significant amount of water. In the current plans, they have included sections of drop-down fencing and the new model shows little effect on flooding, however, it appears they are wanting to install springs and let the pressure of the floodwater and debris trigger the opening of the fence. The method of opening the fence needs to be immediate and failsafe. When farmers use drop-down fencing, they manually drop the fences prior to a flood arriving. I can't imagine a spring-loaded fence dropping down until the water and debris is at least half the height of the fence.

35

40

So the flood model again is oversimplified and wrong and is threatening my family and neighbours' homes and property. In this latest document there's comments: concern for downstream site of the solar farm, recommendation 22A. Again, this shows a total lack of understanding of flooding. They should be worried about upstream properties because as water strikes a barrier it bounces back against the

45

flood, building up the water like a bow wave of a boat. All floods are unpredictable and many arrive at this site very quickly.

5 For example, in early – in September 1998 it started to rain late in the afternoon and overnight there was 125 millimetres of rain in the catchment. By lunchtime the next day, our farm was totally inundated and we were isolated for five days. It was the fourth flood that year. We never get much notice of a flood arriving. Can I just have a look at the next slide, please? This is a rare photo taken from out on the Tamworth Road looking back towards the solar farm site and the hills, and it was in the 1971
10 flood when the – which was one of the bigger floods and this – the flood was actually just starting to recede at that particular point in time. Now, unfortunately, I haven't got a pointer, but you can see - - -

15 MR HUTTON: I have one.

MR GLOVER: You've got one. I didn't realise the screen would be quite so far away. Yes. Thank you very much. Okay. Thank you. So this is our property here and this is the Orange Grove Road, and this is where the discharge comes out of the river at Galtons, and this is the area here where the solar farm is going to be. So you
20 can see that there is considerable water and the river used to run down there. So it gets down to the back of that farm and it has moved further south over time. So that's the current river here now running around this way.

25 MR HUTTON: I see, yes.

MR GLOVER: And you can see another major discharge point here. So there's a lot of water that comes here and for the fencing I would suggest some automatic electronic mechanism be designed and tested; if successful, used to drop all the panels simultaneously when the flood watch is issued for the Peel Namoi. And that's
30 only a few hours before we really get inundated. To manually drop this fence and this – the whole perimeter of the fence is about 10 kilometres. So for what they've got, say, they want to drop down. We're talking two or three kilometres, which is probably 3000 panels, you know. How the hell are they going to drop that down in a timely manner?

35 So – and I think it would require a team of people to do that with four-wheel drives. Of course, don't forget it would be wet and boggy and there's potential for them to even get trapped on the side if they're trying to manually drop down 3000 panels. From my understanding, there's only two or three people going to be employed and I
40 question whether this would be – whether they would be capable of doing anything at short notice. Do I get a few more seconds for finding the pointer?

MR HUTTON: There's still one minute to go. That's fair.

45 MR GLOVER: Okay. So we really think that there needs to be a proper plan for dropping down the fence with strict protocols in place. I've also got major concerns that there is – in all the modelling there has been no mention of the poles that are

going to hold up the 480 thousand-odd panels. So there's going to be an area inside a fence with whole heap of poles and there's been no modelling to show what that's actually going to do on the speed of the water, and I think it's actually probably going to slow it down. And I think the – there's a concern there and there needs to be more modelling done there. I was recently sent a 27 page document on an innovative fence design. I've got a couple of minutes to go, if that's all right.

MR HUTTON: Please continue.

MR GLOVER: I was sent – I was recently sent a 27 page document on an innovative fence design for an 11 acre solar farm in the Moree Plains Shire Council area. There's a one per cent flood level there and the flood is 200 millimetres deep on the site. And so the Moree Council has taken the flooding at that site a lot more seriously than the Department of Planning seems to have done in this site. Mr Chairman, I would like to suggest that this commission appoint another consultant with more experience with flooding and rivers in the western areas to review and resolve the issues of fencing and flooding.

This needs to be done keeping in mind the extent of the flooding in this area, and the suggestion of only a partial drop-down fence and whether it can be dropped in time, and also the effect of hundreds of poles which will be within this area. We seem to be very heavily reliant on models, rather than actually measuring things, and modelling is only good until something unexpected happens. The modelling for Chernobyl and Fukushima was only found out to be wrong after cataclysmic events. I do not get the impression that pitt&sherry have put much effort into thinking about the unexpected.

The other issue I have is that this report discusses protection of public assets. It does not cover protection of private assets. The house sites in the vicinity have been chosen very carefully with historic floods in mind. Even the new house on Myalla has been put up in the air to miss a flood and had a large levy built around it to protect other assets at that home. And all these decisions were made when there was nothing built in this floodway. Mr Chairman, I have a question for you. Who's going to be responsible for the private assets of neighbours if this project goes ahead and there is massive damage to our – massive and unexpected damage to our assets?

Is it the New South Wales Government for approving it? Is it the Gunnedah Solar Farm, or is it the owners of Myalla, or are we just stuck with it? The solar farm should not be there. But if the State needs it so badly, it should have guaranteed zero impact. If not, then those who are impacted should be entitled to compensation. Photon have walked away from this – Photon should have walked away from this project when they realised it was across a major discharge from the Namoi Valley. There is another proposal for a sun farm in a less flooded area and I believe that that would be a much better proposal for the government to pursue.

Everyone I speak to who has firsthand knowledge and experience in local floods cannot believe this project might go ahead. So, Mr Chairman, my request to this

commission is to reject this proposal. There are plenty of places in New South Wales to put many solar farms, rather than in a major floodway. The risks, I believe, are far greater than the benefits. I also want you to know how difficult this process has been for me, my family and the neighbours, and we're all very busy people.

5 Some have been challenged by technology and by being able to understand the huge amount of material that's been thrown at us through these various submissions.

And I would like to suggest that you recommend to the government that projects of State significance be required to have significant sums of money available for community groups to employ their own consultants to ground their submissions and help everyone through the process. And, finally, the Department of Planning said that the solar farm is approvable. This is not a sound recommendation. To me, this also means that it is open to rejection. When we met with the Department of Planning, they said they had never been asked to assess, let alone approve a solar farm in a floodway. So I know my family and I begged the commission to reject this proposal. Thank you very much for your time.

10
15

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Glover. I now call on Rob Galton, who has asked for five minutes.

20

MR R. GALTON: Mr Chairman, I, Rob Galton, speaking on behalf of my family, close neighbours and friends, oppose the proposed construction of a solar farm which is joining my property on its southern boundary and my southern boundary is the Namoi River. Before I ask you some questions to take into consideration, I must make you aware that I'm not opposed to solar energy in any way or form. My concern here is the location of the panels and security fencing. In the event of a Namoi River flood, there are many tributaries, which include upstream the Peel and Cockburn Rivers which flow west from Tamworth joining up with the Namoi approximately 10 kilometres upstream from this site.

25
30

Approximately five kilometres downstream from this site, the Mooki River enters the Namoi River. Joining the Namoi River at Gunnedah is Rangari Creek. Then at Boggabri the Coxs Creek enters the river, along with all the unnamed creeks that run into the Namoi during heavy rain events. Also, you have Keepit Dam, which when at a 100-plus per cent, New South Wales State Water commence releasing water onto the already swollen river system as a safety precaution for its asset being Lake Keepit. What I'm alluding to here is the fact that when all these rivers and creeks converge on each other, which will happen in time or happen again, there is only one way for the water to go, which is further and further away from the river's main channel, causing major flooding and destruction of manmade and natural resources.

35
40

When a moderate to major flood happens, we are cut off from town for sometimes up to a week. And one point I would like to know is how did the independent expert advice panel of flood levels be collated when there is absolutely no way that anyone from town can get out there to make suggestions where the water goes. Your only experts in the field are the people that live here and know what procedures to undertake to survive in such event of a flood. The so-called security drop fence will

45

act like a large contour bank, in my opinion, once it is completely covered in flood debris. I'm not sure if you're familiar with flood events in the upper Namoi Valley, sir, but water is fast moving and very dangerous.

- 5 No engineering fencing feat will match the might and power of several thousand megalitres of water moving rapidly along its chosen route each and every hour during moderate to major flooding. Each flood is different. There is never two the same as each other because of the large catchment area which feeds this particular part of the Namoi flood plain. Local council regulations for building any – for any
- 10 building to be approved in this direct flood area must be surrounded by a 1.8 metre contour bank, which you will notice tomorrow on your site inspection of the home built on-site as Myalla. The proposed solar farm proposal is to be built on ground level.
- 15 In my opinion the security fence, once full of flood debris, will become a major contour bank during a flood event ensuring floodwater will be moved to new areas we haven't seen before including the inundation of the surrounding family homes, sheds and private assets. My wife, Prue, three children that are all under six – Cooper, Pippa and Rosie – and I – and lived at 726 Orange Grove Road for almost
- 20 12 years. The Namoi River's first major breakout site between Keepit Dam and Gunnedah for flows onto the northern side of the river is on my property. As you will see tomorrow on the site inspection there is a large gully and watercourse which flows directly from the Namoi River in a north-westerly direction straight into the heart of the solar farm site.
- 25 I can recall upon seven different floods in my 12 years. In consultation with neighbouring landholders who have lived in this direct vicinity a lot longer than I have, I am constantly reminded that I haven't witnessed and been involved in a large flood yet. The last time all the tributaries flowed together and caused major damage
- 30 was in the year 2000. Considering the expected lifespan of this proposed solar farm – 30-odd years – it is inevitable it will happen again.
- We must nearly be due for another one. I ask you to consider the following questions: why should such a large construction proposal be approved in a major
- 35 flood area. Why should such a large construction proposal be approved on some of the richest agricultural land in Australia where many winter and summer crops thrive, cattle and sheep and lambs across Australia have been grazed on the Namoi River flats.
- 40 I've travelled over most of Australia through my 20 years as a livestock agent. I can assure you that the riverside flats downstream from Keepit Dam to Gins Leap, west of Boggabri is some of the best grazing you will find, bar none. I am also deeply concerned for our close neighbours and friends with young families and children on the northern boundary to this proposed project. They, too, have invested a lot of
- 45 money and hard work to live in this pristine part of the Namoi Valley.

I am sure there is a lot less productive land than this proposed Orange Grove site in this great state and country that would be more suited – I've got 30 seconds to go, sir – would be more suited to solar production and not affected by major and moderate natural disaster events as discussed previously. I hope you take these and all other
5 speakers valid and very important points into consideration and you are able to put your concerns into perspective upon your arrival at the site tomorrow. Thank you, sir. Thank you, members.

10 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Rob. The next speakers are Tony and Debbie Affleck.

MS D. AFFLECK:

MR HUTTON: Sorry?

15 MS AFFLECK: Is that three minutes each or - - -

MR HUTTON: Been registered as one speaker but – yes, please carry on.

20 MR T. AFFLECK: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I haven't got any notes but I just – we want to talk from our heart. We're in – on 526 Tudgey Lane which was never 526 Tudgey Lane till recently. So we go back a long way. We've been there for – since '93 and I've been in the area since '65. I've seen a lot of floods. Geoff has covered that fairly well, the flooding, but there is a lot of aspects that
25 should be looked at. One that I did pick out was when we get a lot of heavy rain they want to put a fence in and they want to drop the fence. Who's going to drop the fence? You cannot access that country if we – if we get a major flood it has got to be heavy rain. If it's heavy rain you try to walk across that country, you go down to your waist nearly in a lot of places.

30 I leased the property – Myalla – from Les Shaw, who was the original owner, for three years and I grew crops on the same country where the solar farm is going. In '98 I lost all my crops. We had four floods in three months, roughly. Heavy rain. You could not access that country. You wouldn't be able to drive over it. You wouldn't be able to walk over it. I have personal experience of it. Me and my wife
35 are very concerned about our way of life, our visual aspects of that property, also noise. And everything has been fairly well covered by the previous speakers but I – that's probably it in a nutshell. They've covered most of that side of it.

40 We're worried about the devaluation of our property. As we have – along there now most of the farms are hobby farms. People have got work off-farm to make a living. So there – more or less their superannuation is in their property. And if the solar farm goes ahead who's going to really want to walk in and purchase a property with
45 overlooking a solar farm. Without taking a fair hit in the price. That's really one of the aspects that I'm concerned about. Plus we just – we love the way we live. We love – everybody comes out our farm and they look across – looks out our back door and looks across at our view, they tell us – they say this is unreal. And Graeme, Colin up the road, Chris, everyone is the same. Thanks for your time.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Okay. The sixth speaker registered is Graeme and Emma Brown. They asked for 10 minutes so thank you, Graeme.

5 MR G. BROWN: Thank you for your time. Speaking on behalf of my wife, Emma, and our two kids, Darby and Maggie. We live to the north of the proposed solar farm. We have 20 metres elevation to the solar farm where we've just built a new house overlooking the site where the solar farm is proposed to go. If the ground level was flat the proposed tree plantings that they're putting in might come into effect but as we're elevated it's not going to have any effect at all except maybe
10 block out the first row of fencing. But after reading the department's assessment we've got a few topics I would like to bring up. With the fencing, along with the other speakers I believe there needs to be a proper model of – as to how it's going to work.

15 The floodwaters are very unpredictable in this area and they rise very fast and water moves very fast. And what if the access to this site is completely blocked off by floodwater, who's going to attend to the fence and lower the fence. The people living to the south understandably are very worried about this and I think it should be
20 taken into consideration. The capacity of the solar farm states that it's going to power 48,000 homes. I'm wondering where these homes are. It doesn't say – is this in the Gunnedah community. Is it Tamworth? Is it going out to Bourke? And is the power going to be any cheaper after they pay the large amount of funds to landowners to make it more profitable than growing cotton and good crops as it's
25 good country.

And after they build the solar farm and then pay for CEOs, shareholders and all the rest, is the power going to be any cheaper? Are we going to be any further ahead as a community other than just taking up good farming country. The vegetation buffer,
30 which affects us, it states:

The applicant must establish and maintain a mature vegetation buffer.

35 We're wondering what's – it doesn't specify what species of trees and who determines the best outcome for visual screening. This will no doubt be outline in the landscape plan after consultation with council and surrounding landowners. What if we think is adequate is different to what council think. Who do we talk to? Sure they – we live to the north of the solar farm and the trees can only be so high otherwise there's no point, they're going to be blocking out the solar farm with the
40 shade. 460,000 solar panels is a lot to hide with a few trees. The visual of the actual panels, it states:

The applicant must minimise the off-site visual impacts including the potential for any glare or reflection from the solar panels.

45 We're wondering how will this be done. There's no details given as to how this will be achieved, what testing has been done to prove that these won't give off any glare.

We are the residents labelled on the map as VP9. Figure 8 is a photo montage taken from our property. I believe this is not an accurate indication of the distance, as the camera is conveniently focused on the plans in the lower portion of the picture, therefore giving a distorted image of the solar panels in the far distance, so they had something to hide there. Since the solar panel – the solar project was proposed, the footprint has grown due to now they're using the tracking panels, where originally they weren't. It's gone from 220 hectares to, I think, it's 340 now, which is considerable to us with the views, and also very considerable to the people to the south of the solar farm worried about the flood as there's more of a blockage now.

I don't believe Photon have improved our situation through any of the studies at all and things just seem to be getting worse. In the proposal in figure 3 on page 13, it talks of flooding, land use, traffic, visual, land values and noise. Most of these issues seem to be addressed to a degree except land values. There's been nothing specified about land values, which we are deeply concerned about as we have bought this place. As Chris and Tony have said, the view is our number 1 asset thing. The road upgrade, so it's prior to commencement of the project a condition is the upgrade to the Old Blue Vale Road, amongst others, for a minimum of 100 metres from the intersection meeting Kelvin Road.

This upgrade has clearly already commenced before a decision has been made. Why would such works start before a decision is made? Is this a coincidence that council have just taken it on themselves to do it? Surely they would know that it's possibly funding from solar farms coming to do that road, but, as you see when you drive out tomorrow, there's – the road has already started to be upgraded. They're ripped it all up. If I could just take the time to talk about solar farming in general. One thing – one positive, I think, that has come out of it is I have a better opinion of solar farming now than what I used to have. To me, solar farming is an individual – or solar power is an individual thing.

There's millions of acres in Australia already taken up with rooves, sheds, car parks. I don't see why we have to take up good land, good food producing land. There's no need to get rid of food to produce energy. Food, water and energy are the three things that keep us going and you can't swap one for the other, and that's what we're doing here. I believe government subsidies should be given to the people, not to large overseas companies coming in to rape and pillage Australia of her resources. There's already – if the power – if the solar panels go onto people's rooves, the power goes from the roof straight down into the house. It's going to be so much more efficient.

It takes 460,000 panels to service 48,000 homes. If the panels were on people's rooves, that could be reduced to 300,000 panels because they're not losing power in the wire. It doesn't have to go from the solar farm, across the river into the substation, along into Gunnedah, out the different roads. It's just from on the roof straight into people's houses. The subsidies could go to – for example, if Woolworths got a large subsidy from the government to make it viable to make a car park, which they've now put a cover over just recently, just imagine if that could

have solar panels, if they made it so they're solar panels and the people park underneath the solar panels. What a great use of land.

5 There's no need to go ripping up and putting solar panels on good, food-producing land which is going to – it's getting scarcer and scarcer and I'm sure everyone in this room would agree that the thing in Australia that's getting most scarce and the hardest to get hold of is land, especially in big cities. And out here in the regional areas there's only four or five people living under each roof. You could put solar panels on there to power the people. I understand in Sydney there's – there could be 10,000 people living under the – under a roof of a skyscraper, and so that's a different scenario. But out here in the regional places, it's just a roof with four or five people under it; easily powered.

15 And that's where I believe the solar panels should be going, and if we – and solar farming is not something just for this individual farm. Solar is becoming an issue right across Australia and it's something that the government needs to deal with very carefully, and the subsidies need to go to the right people, and I believe that's the people of Australia, not large overseas companies where the money gets wasted. Thank you for your time.

20 MR HUTTON: Okay. I would just like to acknowledge and thank all the speakers today for taking the time to prepare and come along. It's appreciated. We certainly value the opportunity to listen to the issues that you have. That brings to an end the registered speakers. So I think at this point I will officially close up the meeting and just ask you – welcome you to avail yourself of the tea and coffee if you want to 25 before you leave. Otherwise, I will close the meeting. So thanks very much for your time today. Thank you.

30 **RECORDING CONCLUDED**

[10.27 am]