

As a local farmer and volunteer fire fighter of our local NSW Rural Fire Service Brigade I strongly object to this proposal.

Having dealt with many fires including cars, homes, grass and timber fires I fear to having to deal with the potential catastrophe of dealing with a fire in a solar development of this size.

The sheer size of this proposed development with some 900,000 solar panels, electrical conduits, transformers and a substation on 1500 acres is seriously concerning.

This development is in close proximity to towns, neighbouring landowners and the heavily treed gum swamp, neighbouring swamp in the "Mountain View" property and back creek. The heavily treed areas would be considered bushfire prone land and at increased risk.

Discussions have been held as to the method of combatting a fire within these sites and the risk to firefighters. A number of issues have been identified. That is why volunteer firefighters will not be entering the site. WHS legislation providing for the safety of people must be met. Why should we put ourselves at risk of electrocution, entrapment and toxic poisoning? We are just volunteers. How can you be safe fighting fires with 8 foot chain mesh fence that goes for kilometres around a development full of rows of panels.

We all saw the Walla Gerogery fires caused by the Walla tip which was unstoppable in the conditions that day. All it takes is one bad day, imagine if on that day there was 605 hectares in which we could not fight fires, the consequences would have been more dire. There was enough loss that day. How will they control the hairy panic that grows with summer rains and becomes a nightmare. It is prolific in this area. Why should the landowners around this development be put at extra risk and stress worrying about a fire or the loss of their business should a fire start on their own property and damage solar infrastructure as they cannot insure for such loss. Neighbouring farmers should be indemnified, they did not ask for such infrastructure next door.

Most fires in this area are caused by mother nature, on undeveloped farm land, the increased risk should not be borne by volunteer firefighters and there is insufficient manpower from HAZMAT trained Fire and Rescue teams in this country area.

I also object on the basis that there will be a loss of agriculture and associated agricultural work. A considerable amount of hay and cropping contracting has been undertaken on the subject land that will be lost and equates to significant dollars over the long 30 year term. Short term construction jobs should not replace the longevity of agricultural production. Solar jobs should not replace agricultural jobs that in this area that are safe. Sheep are not an excuse as agricultural retention as they cannot guarantee pasture growth which this area has not had for the past 2 years due to warm springs. There is no guarantee they will run sheep, the conditions say "where practicable", no guarantee of agricultural retention at all. An increased reliance on cropping is required during warmer drier years which is the benefit of this strong agricultural area. The hay from cropping is what feeds our stock but will not be achievable under panels. Grazing crops will not be available for winter feeding under panels. Ask the landowners what they have been feeding their stock over the past 2 years when pasture was minimal, the answer will be hay.

If climate change is to be the basis for the need for renewable energy we seriously need to consider that the most impact caused by climate will be on food production and this includes fodder. There needs to be a healthy balance and placing solar developments on less productive land allows for that balance, not prime agricultural land like the "Bega Plains" property on the western side of this development.

I think this development will have a big impact on the Orange Grove function centre with very strong mitigation required, not just tubestock trees. Tubestock do nothing until they are grown and this will take years. A condition of consent should be that the development is fully screened from commencement of construction through to decommission. There should be mature plantings and the developers should be required to give these plants extra attention to ensure survival. There should also be a condition that the section of panels removed from the development to protect Orange Grove from the visual eyesore can never be developed with solar panels.

Mitigation of all concerns must be implemented, neighbours should not suffer so others can financially prosper. Mitigation should have clear requirements for the developers, just asking them to minimise the views does not mean anything, there should be clear definitions of what is acceptable for all impacts.

The substation is poorly located, seemingly at the expense of neighbours with the location further away from the landowners own homes than that of the neighbours and I am sure it would be heartbreakingly that the substation eyesore is being placed in the vicinity of where the R2 neighbours parents were killed in a car accident many years ago. The substation should be located at the most southern part of the development possible.

We all know that technology changes rapidly and find it greatly concerning that our community could be left with a solar waste land should solar become ineffective and inefficient. We are already hearing of problems with transmission capacity and instability. What happens if these foreign developers become insolvent, our community will be left with the mess to clean up with no financial security assuring the landowner will have the capacity to undertake decommission. Financial guarantee should be a condition of consent to protect our community from becoming a wasteland.

The commissioners need to consider the mental anguish and conflict solar developments have caused in our community that is currently extreme and will affect mental health. Our area has thrived through strong agricultural benefit not seen in many other areas through drought. The controversy is an true indicator that this development is not right for this area.