

Thursday, 12 November 2020

Dear Mr Chairman and Panel Members

We are writing to again state our reason's for opposing the Large-Scale Solar Facility being proposed by FRV at Walla Walla. Our reasons for this are broad and varied as outlined below:

1. **Evidence of due diligence:** There is a lack of quantifiable information that gives us, our family, or any of the neighbour's evidence-based assurance that this proposal will not damage our land, livestock, environment, health and the biodiversity of our area. To date everyone from NGH to Bison to FRV and the Department of Planning can only reference the Shepparton Report as evidence that the Heat Island Effect has been studied in Australian Conditions despite it being significantly smaller and despite the fact that Solar Farms have operated in Australia for more than a decade. We have been provided with a conflicting report that indicates "that the photovoltaic heat island effect causes large solar power plants to increase local temperatures and the effect may be felt 300m away. They call for research to investigate the relationship between panel density or spatial footprint of the power plant, the size of the heat island effect, and its effect on surrounding areas such as wild lands or farms."

To date we have not been able to find any longitudinal studies that have looked at the effects on biodiversity, water, soil, animal welfare, human health, or waterways in relation to solar farms. Despite this being one of the first things we asked for the lack of evidence provided screams volumes about the lack of care taken to monitor these effects once the infrastructure has been forced into communities.

If they are not monitoring the impacts on the environment in and surrounding the solar farms how can they meet the obligations to minimise harm, manage and report on environmental conditions and protect us as neighbours. If they are monitoring these things and the reports are kept internal what assurances do, we have as neighbours when the company has already proven that we cannot trust them.

2. **Sub Station:** The substation is currently located on the North-Western corner of the development directly out the front of our property and out of sight of both involved land holders. It will be highly visible from our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor windows. Despite numerous requests to have this moved, FRV have merely pushed it up the hill slightly and insisted that is the only place it can go. We object to this as we believe that the substation is a significant eyesore and a permanent structure. The landholders who are being generously compensated for this LSS facility are getting all the benefits with none of the impacts/effects. Despite never attending our property several people have suggested that the slight alteration made by FRV was significant and greatly improved our view. To date no one from TransGrid, The Department, The IPC, the neighbours, or anyone who told the panel last week that the changes were sufficient have stood in our kitchen and seen this from our perspective. I believe that if the substation were moved to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4th pylon (refer Pylon Image) the substation would be accessible by TransGrid. They could subdivide the required 100 acres and would still have access to the remainder of their property if/when the solar infrastructure is removed. It fits within the identified footprint of the project. It would move all heavy transport impacts away from our front gate and place all negative impacts where they belong, with those who are in favour of this project and who are being compensated. We believe that as this is a permanent substation it will devalue our property and is vastly different to a solar facility itself. My wife and neighbour had a conversation with a TransGrid representative who indicated that the substation did not have to be in a specific location but needed to be consulted and placed in a location that best met the needs of the community. As the neighbours and local community, we feel that the current location does not meet the best needs and should be reviewed and moved as suggested to pylon 3/4.
3. **Battery Storage:** currently there are no plans for batteries to be installed at this facility. There is however a wedge of land again directly in front of our property that has not been utilised within the project layout. Whilst Cliona has stated that that land would not be used for battery installation if batteries were added down the

track. We are not comfortable that we can take her word as truth. This again would be a significant eyesore and again devalue our property.

4. **Flooding:** we have 13 dams on our property. 6 of them fill predominantly from Back Creek when flooded. FRV have indicated that our flood peak for a 100-year flood is 80cm. We have evidence that this is incorrect and has flooded beyond this indicative level on a number of occasions in the past 20 years. See Various Flood Images attached. As indicated by Lynette LaBlack a neighbour of the Bomen Solar Facility they are experiencing significant water runoff issues at Bomen and the EPA is currently investigating. Being the property that sits between the proposed Walla and Culcairn LSS Facilities we will suffer the cumulative impacts of flooding. All flooding will bring with it any debris, waste, contaminants, and hazards that may be contained on their sites. We are also concerned about erosion at the Benambra Road crossing as there is already existing damage. In addition we are concerned that the installation of a heavy transport crossing along Back Creek within the project footprint will alter the natural water course and could potentially divert water creating issues in areas that are currently not affected on our land. If the water does become contaminated through broken panels, oil/fuel/chemical spills, leaching etc... what guarantee's do we have as neighbours that the cost associated with clean up and restoration, livestock health, or herd replacement will be adequately compensated. What guarantees are in place to ensure that any damage to the local environment through impacts to Back Creek (which runs through both the proposed Walla Walla and Culcairn facilities) which is a tributary to Billabong Creek which runs into the Murray River will be rectified and compensated by the proponent.
5. **Impacts on neighbours:** From the beginning we have asked that they move the substation and that they do what they can to mitigate to impacts on the neighbours. We asked that they protect Orange Grove Gardens business by moving the infrastructure away and providing adequate screening, we asked that they provide Dorothy with sufficient screening to protect her property and livestock and we also asked that they move it away from the rental property located 80 metres from the site. To date the only change they have made any headway with is moving it away from Orange Grove. However, the proposed changes are not going to protect that business. Between us we have toured 7 solar farms at various stages of construction and operation and are certain that if it was our wedding we would not want any of that infrastructure/construction in the background of our wedding photos or as a backdrop to our big day. Weddings are expensive and if you're going to pay over \$10k for the day of your dreams you better believe that no one wants a construction site/solar farm in the background or the sound of reversing trucks and work men as the audio track for the day. The business will be significantly impacted for the duration of construction which may make it too hard to save. They have made no effort to listen to Dorothy's concerns about heat and dust and continue to insist that the trees on the lease land that she holds between the project and her property provide a sufficient buffer. Despite not providing the 5-6 rows of dense foliage at different heights as recommended. Studies show that dirty water, and dirty/dusty pastures are unpalatable and can create respiratory problems in young cattle. If water and pastures are unpalatable cattle will take longer to gain weight and it will have an impact on the supplemental feed requirements of our livestock which will impact our financial return. As cattle breeders this will have an impact on the land, livestock, and income of all neighbouring properties.
6. **Trees:** Removing large old trees from our local environment (including hollow bearing trees) and replacing them with seedlings and nest boxes will have an immediate negative impact on the local environment as will the installation of a 6-8-foot chain mesh fence. Having visited several solar facilities, I have witnessed how ineffective these plantings are for visual screening. Tree block shown in (Tree Block 2Yr Old) was planted in 2018 this shows the growth during the 2-year period. Looking at tree blocks planted in the area it will take 12-15 years before any of these plantings do what they are supposed to do. Which is half the lifespan of the proposal. As you can see the suggested plantings using locally acquired native species will do little to reduce the views of neighbours, road users or guests at Orange Grove and will not achieve suggested growth within 5 years of planting. Remember the panels themselves are 4 metres high. Both Orange Grove and our property are also elevated and look down onto the proposed development site. I have also attached additional photos of screening planted at other solar facilities prior to commissioning. The sparseness of plantings and the size of seedlings offers no protection from visual, heat, dust, construction, or anything. It also does not replace the

biodiversity of and habitat of the tress's removed and the habitat disturbed by construction. These things will take decades to recover.

7. **Community:** Surely the closest community is the one that matters. Of the submissions that were received by the department they stated that 40% were in support. However, when you break that down to the local community within 5km it was only 14 submission in favour and 41 submissions were against (that confirms that almost half the total submission received were from within 5kms and were against this proposal). It should not matter if Joe Blo from Queensland/Albury thinks this is good or the landholder's mates/family from Albury, Gerogery and further afar want to call up and say it's a good idea. They are not the community affected which was evident by their lack of reason's for why they supported it. As you saw through the panel there is a deep divide and while the support for the project was predominantly from friends and associates of the landholders there was no real connection, reasons, passion or emotions displayed in their arguments. In stark contrast the opponents are connected to this project, affected by it and spoke passionately and emotionally about it. We chose not to speak on the day because we both knew we couldn't keep it together. We understand how hard it was for everyone who did but felt we would be better able to state our case in writing given our current situation. There are many who felt that being on the phone or video call was too much. We are very disappointed that there was no opportunity for our family to speak with the panel or show the panel our perspective when they visited recently and feel that we and our concerns have been constantly ignored/overlooked throughout this process.
8. **Personal Impacts:** As neighbours we never gave our permission or indicated that we were in support of this project. We did not argue with a neighbour who felt they had made the right financial decision for themselves and their family. Despite this he has repeatedly and incorrectly told people within the community, the Department of Planning and now the Independent Panel that we had initially given him approval and withdrew it after he had signed his contract. He also during his call to the panel last week indicated that we had told him "Orange Grove Gardens were leading a charge and we were getting on board". This is incorrect and seems like an attempt to cause further division within our community, in particular the community closest to the proposed project. We advised Orange Grove Gardens that they were looking at hosting a Solar Development as they had not told anyone.

We did meet with a Representative of Bison and we did discuss whether it would be a suitable option for that end of our property. Following that meeting we looked at what they had presented, what we had plans for and we considered what impact this would have on our plans, our land, our neighbours, our livestock, local habitat and most importantly our kids. We decided it was not for us, there were too many unanswered questions. At that point we had been researching LSS for a couple of months and were coming up empty on quantifiable research for either side of the argument. In addition, the company presentation had so many gaping holes/mistakes and the agent had no real knowledge of what he was selling. At our next conversation we told him we were not interested. He also advised that they were not interested at this time that the owner of Bega Plains had signed on. He said they may be able to negotiate something down the track we told him we were not interested at all. We have also been approached since by another Solar Company seeking to buy or lease our land for another solar project. We told that company we are not interested. Again, this is direct contrast to our neighbours repeated statement that a neighbour was possibly upset due to failed negotiations/jealousy. A conversation is not a negotiation and at no stage did we talk financials.

At that meeting with the representative he told us the substation would be the equivalent of 3-4 shipping containers on a concrete slab with a 6-foot fence around it. Imagine our shock when on a day trip to see 5 solar farms at various stages of construction we witnessed firsthand what a substation looked like at facilities that this project dwarfed. When Bison sat at our kitchen table after months of asking what this would look like they unrolled a large image with a superimposed substation sitting down the hill across from our front gate dwarfing the tree's around it, we were incredibly upset. It wasn't really until this point that we knew what our neighbour meant when she said "we knew you guys were getting the worst of it but at the end of the day we wanted the money".

As for his claim that he wouldn't have signed up if he knew we were against it that is untrue. When we first heard about this project we were surprised. The resident of Roseville had told me at the coffee shop that he was planning to do this too. He told me he felt bad when someone had called for him to come and speak about our community to help fight against large scale solar at a meeting in Culcairn (attended by Neoen, TransGrid, Department Representatives and NSW Farmers) because he was planning to do it too. I couldn't understand how he was continuing to negotiate his contract even though he had seen the upset and anger caused within the community by the proposed Jindera, Glenellen and Neoen projects that were already being argued about and causing strong divisions. Which is in direct contrast to his statement that he would not have signed up if he knew that people would be so against it. He told me he was doing it for the 7 faces on the East side of his cattle grid and he owed nothing to the community because "where was his community" when he was paying \$26k per month struggling to hold onto what he had. This conversation was repeated many times. Along with conversations about how well he had negotiated his contract, how everything that he could get added to protect him and his family had been nipped out and added in. He told us we should jump onboard "it's better to have it than to look at it for 30 years". He told me that Bega Plains was also signing on. The owner of Bega Plains strongly denied this multiple times, but he continued to insist they were. We questioned the owner of Bega Plains multiple times from when we were first advised that they were subdividing their land. They denied being involved with Solar and insisted that they were just rearranging their subdivision to ensure that their daughter could have a title of land large enough to build a house on if she wanted to come back here. The Bega Plains home block and remaining 220+ acres were then listed for sale for approximately \$1.4 million. The owner of Roseville told me he had contacted the Real Estate Agents and advised them that Bega Plains were planning to put large scale solar on the remaining land which he felt buyers needed to know (I agree that they needed to know that too). Once prospective buyers were told of these plans all negotiations failed. This again is in direct contrast to the claim by FRV that solar will not negatively impact sale prices.

We did tell him we were fighting it, at which time he said fair enough if I were going to have to look at it for 30 years, I would probably fight it too. But you know they have never knocked one back so good luck. At the end of this I'll buy you a beer. I can tell you after all the lies and rumours he has spread I will not be having a beer with him anytime now or in the future. Without knowing me and my family beyond conversations at the coffee shop he has looked at us and made judgements about our lives, our finances, our decisions and our finances and had the audacity to write them down and make public statements as though his guesses are based on fact. Not only is it incredibly insulting and hurtful. He is wrong in his assessments. We have not spoken about him or his family within the community and will not. We have commented to the department and now to you to defend our reputation from the lies and false assumptions made by him.

I do work at the local public school as a General Assistant 1 day per week. This is not to support my struggling farm as he has told anyone who will listen. This is a strategy to support my mental health which has hit an all-time low in the past 2 years. My work at the school is a welcome distraction from everything. We also volunteer within our community spending between 5-25 hours per week working with a group of teens training them to become volunteers and support their community. This too is an incredibly positive thing for my mental health. My work at the school is not indicative of a "dire financial situation" as suggested by our neighbour. We have less debt than the average Australian Household, we have supported my grandmother through Aged Care until she passed last December, we own our cars and equipment and have continued to feed our stock and build our stock numbers through the recent drought conditions without needing to purchase additional fodder. Our farm is self-sustaining, and our finances are none of our neighbour's business and he certainly should not feel entitled to make assumptions about our finances and our lives and spread them like common gossip as though they are fact.

This neighbour has also told me that when I get sick of looking at the solar farm he will be cashed up and can buy my land. Which is not only incredibly arrogant it is just outright insulting.

9. **Accommodation and Employment:** Walla Walla is despite the assessment of some doing incredibly well. During the past year we have had new businesses open, employers increasing production and homes being snapped up. We have had new families move to town and are continuing to see growth despite all the challenges and

against the odds. We do not have high unemployment within our community as is evident by the program being run to try to attract refugees to settle within our community by offering them jobs within our larger businesses. While establishing this program they have had issues finding available housing opportunities. There are not many available rentals or accommodation options in our town and if the ones that are available were to be utilised for a transient workforce it would impact the ability of people who want to move here permanently to settle their family. Saying that they will seek local accommodation and workforce options first is merely a tick box exercise like their consultation process. Where they will say "Yes we looked local but got no one so here is a workforce from out of town". Speaking with workers at multiple sites they indicated that most of them travelled site to site with these companies and not many jobs went to locals.

10. **Weeds:** As our neighbour so gently pointed out on his call to the panel, and apparently during the panels site visit, we did not spray out our weeds this year. Yes, we had Paterson's Curse and several other weeds this year. Imagine how out of control those weeds would be after 30 years if not managed within the solar farm. I have attached an image of our house (see image x) surrounded by Hairy Panic. This weed is prolific within this area and if not effectively managed within the solar farm it will bank up under panels, against fences and inverters and anything else there is. This weed when dry is highly combustible. This would be a fire risk if bunched up close to panels which are hot. As we have seen at several solar facilities weed management has not been effective which causes me great concern for the future state of these facilities and the associated fire risks.
11. **Livestock:** As for grazing sheep under the solar panels I feel it would be important to note that calculations of stock numbers that are to be maintained within the facility should be based on DSE of the vacant land (pre installation) and determined by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party not the land holder or FRV. We are yet to find evidence of significant numbers of sheep being grazed under solar panels and question the sustainability of the practice. We have found evidence that studies show that the feed quality under the panels is negatively affected within 3 years reducing the nutritional value and effectiveness of grazing. I am also concerned about livestock wellbeing as it would be easy to miss a sick or fly-struck sheep when observing from outside or from between panel rows.
12. **Glare:** As the neighbours to the North West of the development we will have a significant number of panels pointing in our direction for 4-6 hours a day 365 days a year for 30 years. Depending on the time of year and the angle of the sun we are concerned that we will have significant glint and glare issues. Not only from the panels but also from the metal surfaces/poles/fences and infrastructure. Having viewed other facilities, we were surprised at the amount of glare from the racks. We have also been advised by residents close to the Bomen Solar Facility that back glare is a big issue. This should be further assessed to ensure that no neighbours are affected.
13. **Cumulative Impacts:** As our land makes up the 1.2Kms that separate the proposed Walla Walla and Culcain Developments we are concerned about cumulative impacts on our health, our environment, our livestock, our business and our future. Changes to the land and water flows on both sides of our property could see flooding impacts to our land increased/extended. This will have a financial impact on us and a welfare impact on our livestock and affect the productivity of our grazing land. The land between these 2 projects is where we predominantly calve down our cows, graze our livestock and produce our fodder. Minor changes in soil temperature can have significant impacts on plant health, beneficial and non-beneficial bugs, and the existing microbial activity in the soil. If as some studies suggest the heat island effect is felt up to 300 metres beyond the solar facility this may have a financial impact on us being between the 2 projects as we will need to increase inputs to yield the same benefits from our land. Or livestock will be impacted by dust and noise and from both developments which could impact our calving rates with a flow on effect to our finances.
14. Throughout the recommendation there are several clauses/statements that provided the proponent with opportunities to alter/not complete agreed terms. This is not acceptable. There is also not any real assessable standard by which we can agree/measure that visual, dust and glare, impacts etc have been effectively been managed/mitigated. We are still waiting for the Land Mapping results that we believe would class this land as not permissible for this type of project.

15. We again ask that you consider this from our perspective and deny this application or insist that the changes that we have all said we could live with being:

- Move the substation to pylon 3/4
- Move the infrastructure away from Orange Grove and provide adequate screening and scheduling to protect that business.
- Provide Mrs Hoy with appropriate and adequate screening.
- Move the infrastructure and traffic away from the Schulz rental Property and provide adequate screening.

None of these things would be impossible. But FRV are not willing to compromise to mitigate these issues as they are confident that they will get approval because no Large-Scale Solar Project has been knocked back in NSW.

Finally, in relation to the offer of \$10,000 this was only made to us after we had questioned seeing it in council documents. We have not accepted this offer and do not intend to become business associates with a company like FRV who have shown us no respect through this process. Their consultation has been nothing more than ticking boxes.

Please look at this from the perspective of the local surrounding community. Not the perspective of personal gain, or climate targets. There are many projects under way and under proposal that will not have an impact on a business like Orange Grove, will not place permanent infrastructure at opponents front gates and will have a more valuable contribution to the solar network through proper planning, grid availability, battery installation and more appropriate land parcels.

Kind regards

Shai and Simone Feuerherdt  
Mountain View  
Walla Walla NSW





Benambra Rd 2010

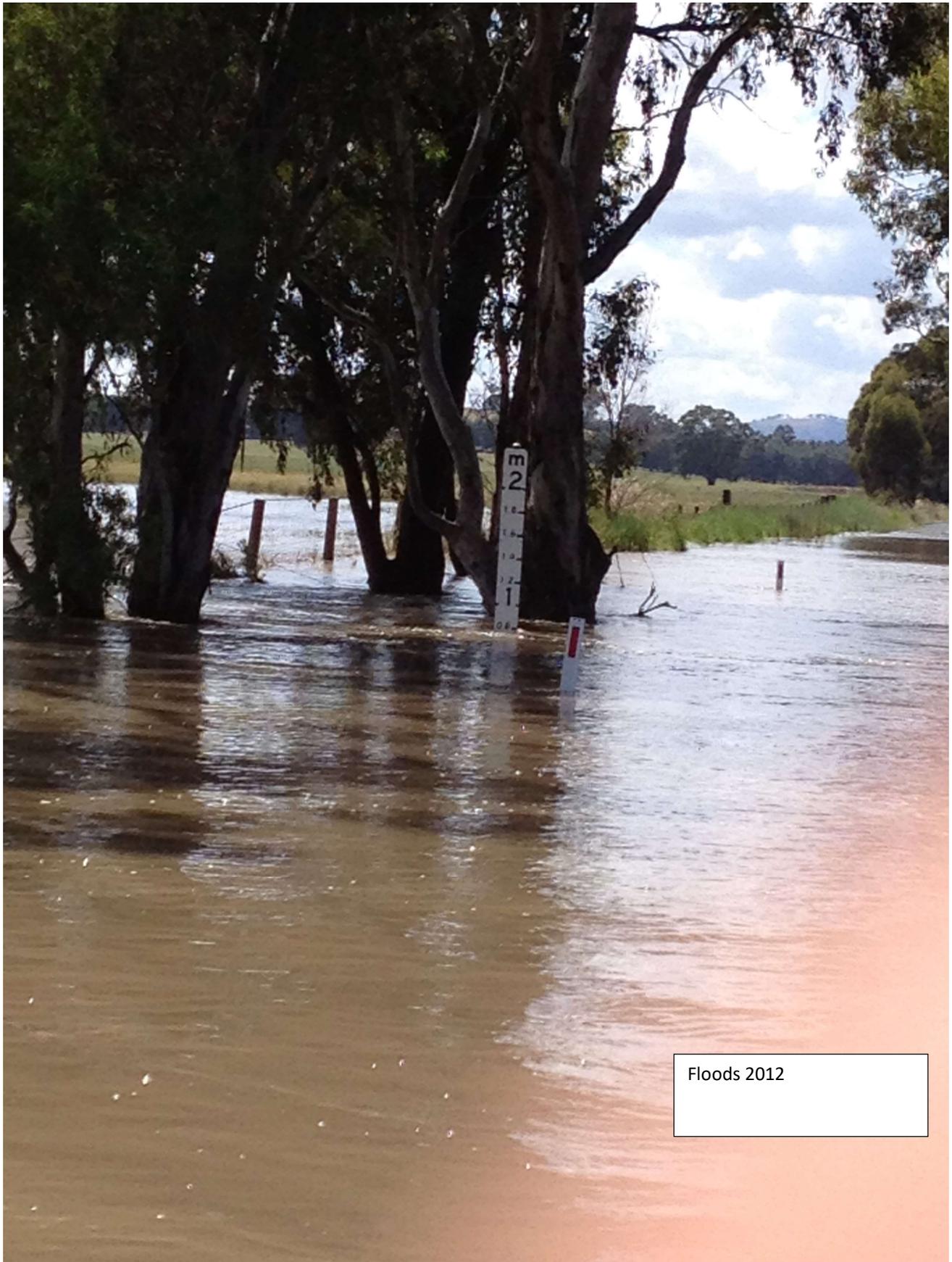




Floods 2011



Floods 2011



Floods 2012



Floods 2016



