

Commissioners

This may be the only chance you get to evaluate the impacts of the impending tsunami of NSW solar projects.

As I write, there are 25 solar projects in the NSW planning process, of which Beryl is but one. They total over 3500 MW of capacity. In addition there are well over 1000MW of approved solar projects yet to begin construction.

Since the end of the Beryl exhibition period on May 25, 2017, 18 new major solar projects have been issued SEARs, with more being added on a weekly basis.

Beryl may be the only one of these to be forwarded to the PAC for determination. All the others will be approved within the next 12 months because that is what the Department does.

In early May, 2017, I submitted the same set of Comments concurrently to the four solar farms then on exhibition, including Beryl (submission 204624) Together with others, I expressed concern for the impact this growing avalanche of Applications would have on energy security and electricity prices. Over the ensuing months, the Department wrote an identical response as the Assessments for these four projects were published.

In the Assessment before you, the response was relegated to the “Other Issues” section. A couple of paragraphs from these identical responses are of particular interest:

“These concerns were expressed at a high level, and were not supported by any detailed evidence showing how intermittent energy in general could affect energy security and/or electricity prices, or how this project in particular would do that.

This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the Department to evaluate these concerns in any meaningful way, particularly in the context where it is required to look at the planning merits of this project.”

This inability to understand, and respond to, the issues is of course typical departmental nonsense.

Over the same ensuing months, the Department changed its mission statement to include:

“To enrich the lives of people in NSW through our work on high quality planning, housing delivery, great design, culture, clean environments, wildlife protection and energy security.”

By adding “energy security”, someone in the Department had enough awareness to recognize the looming disaster.

Over the same ensuing months, NSW and Federal politicians and supporting entities have also recognized this looming disaster.

Over the same ensuing months, every consumer connected to the grid has recognized, through their electricity bills, this looming disaster.

Yet, on four separate occasions, departmental operatives have expressed an inability to understand the comments made by me and others.

I would be very surprised if PAC commissioners, being much closer to the political environment, would claim such an inability to understand and address the issues raised.

The planning process should be bidirectional. The Government, through the Minister, sets the boundaries. Equally, the PAC and the Secretary should advise Government when the process goes awry.

You therefore may only have one chance, through the Beryl Determination, to highlight to the Premier and Cabinet the contribution the NSW Department of Planning & Environment is making to our expensive dark energy future primarily through solar projects, but also through the few remaining active wind applications such as our beloved Jupiter.

Failure to grasp that opportunity would send a message to this and other communities.

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