



Planning, Industry & Environment

Planning Services
Energy Assessments
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Professor Mary O'Kane AC
Chair
Independent Planning Commission
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Dear Professor O'Kane

New England Solar Farm (SSD 9255)

The Department has completed its assessment of the merits of the application for the New England Solar Farm (SSD 9255).

The application is referred to the Independent Planning Commission for determination, as the applicant disclosed a reportable political donation under section 10.4 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) and there were more than 25 public objections to the proposal.

Proposed development

UPC Renewables Australia Pty Ltd (UPC) proposes to develop a new State significant development solar farm located approximately 6 kilometres (km) east of Uralla and 8 km south of Armidale, in the Uralla Shire local government area. It would have a generating capacity of approximately 720 megawatt (MW) and 200 MW/400 MW-hour (MWh) of battery storage.

The solar farm would consist of two solar array areas, being the northern and central array areas, connected by above and/or below ground cabling and an internal access road. The northern and central array areas would have generating capacities of about 500 MW and 220 MW, respectively. The solar farm would connect to TransGrid's existing 330 kilovolt transmission line that transects the development site.

Engagement

During the exhibition of the environmental impact statement (EIS), the Department received a total of 116 submissions, including 13 from government agencies, two from special interest groups and 101 from the public, of which 67 objected to the project. Uralla Shire Council supports the project and none of the government agencies object to the proposal.

Amended application

After reviewing the submissions, UPC decided to make a number of changes to the project to address issues raised in submissions.

These changes included:

- removing the southern array of solar panels;
- removing the construction accommodation village; and
- revising the transport route and proposed road upgrades.

Under Clause 55 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000* (EP&A Regulation), an applicant may amend a development application any time before the application is determined, but only with the agreement of the consent authority.

UPC has lodged formal requests to amend the application setting out the details of the proposed amendments and a comprehensive assessment of the potential consequences of these amendments.

The Department has considered this information in detail during its assessment and supports the proposed amendments as they would significantly reduce the impacts of the project and address some of the key issues raised by the community in submissions.

While the Department published the additional information on its website and sent a copy to agencies for comment, it did not formally seek submissions as the proposed amendments would reduce the impacts of the project without resulting in any new or material changes to the impacts of the project.

Consequently, the Department recommends that the Commission, as the consent authority, agree to the proposed amendment.

Assessment

In assessing the merits of the project, the Department has considered the environmental, social and economic impacts of the project, submissions to the EIS, relevant environmental planning instruments, the suitability of the site of the project, and the public interest, in accordance with the requirements of the EP&A Act.

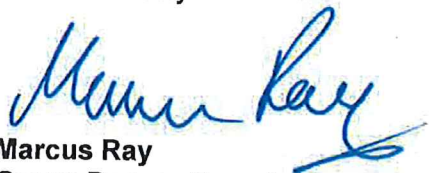
During the assessment process the Department visited the site, and consulted with local residents, Council and relevant government agencies.

Based on this assessment, the Department considers that the project is approvable, subject to the recommended conditions of consent.

I have attached a copy of the Department's assessment report and other relevant documents for the Commission's consideration.

For further information or to arrange a briefing, please contact Nicole Brewer, Director Energy Assessments, on 02 9274 6374.

Yours sincerely



Marcus Ray
Group Deputy Secretary
Planning and Assessment

19/12/2019.