

WALLAROO SOLAR FARM

Destination NSW submission

About Destination NSW

Destination NSW is the lead agency, champion and voice for the visitor economy within the NSW Government.

Established under the *Destination NSW Act 2011* as the lead Government agency for the NSW tourism and major events sector, Destination NSW's charter is to achieve economic and social benefits for the people of NSW through the development of tourism and the securing of major events.

The NSW visitor economy

The visitor economy plays a critical role in fostering economic growth and stability across the state, particularly in regional NSW.

The visitor economy is NSW's fifth largest export earner and contributes approximately 6 per cent of Gross State Product.

In the year ended March 2024, NSW attracted \$52.9 billion in visitor expenditure, which has grown by 31 per cent since the year ended March 2019.

The NSW visitor economy is primed for growth. The state's visitor economy has been expanding at a compound annual growth rate of 7.3 per cent over the past decade, and this is anticipated to increase in line with higher inbound capacity realised through the opening of the new Western Sydney International Airport in 2026.

The value of the visitor economy to regional NSW

In the year ended March 2024, visitors to regional NSW contributed \$26.4 billion in expenditure to local economies – 49.9 per cent of the total visitor expenditure received by the state.

This expenditure represents the critical contribution the visitor economy makes to the stability and growth of regional economies across NSW, particularly to support jobs and businesses in local communities.

The NSW visitor economy comprises almost 116,700 businesses and 292,300 jobs. Of these, regional NSW accounts for 39,000 businesses (33.4 per cent) and more than 75,000 jobs (25.6 per cent) (*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian National Accounts: Tourism Satellite Account*).

The visitor economy is a network of activities and participants including (but not limited to) cafes, restaurants, food services, retail trade, accommodation, clubs, pubs, bars, travel agency and tour operator services, cultural services and more.

Capital Country visitor economy profile

The proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm is located in the Yass Valley Local Government Area, which is part of the Capital Country tourism region (*Source: ABS and Tourism Research Australia*). Capital Country includes the townships of Yass, Goulburn and Queanbeyan.

In the year ended March 2024 Capital Country region welcomed 4.6 million visitors, generating almost \$1.2 billion in visitor expenditure. Expenditure has increased by 38 per cent since the same reporting period in 2019, driven by strong growth from the domestic overnight and domestic daytrip markets:

- \$785 million - domestic overnight visitor expenditure in year ended March 2024 (up 58 per cent on year ended March 2019)
- \$358 million – domestic day trip visitor expenditure in year ended March 2024 (up 8 per cent on year ended March 2019). *NB: domestic day trip visitor numbers are still below pre-Covid levels for the region.*

The visitor economy is a major employer in the region, and accounts for approximately 8.7 per cent of jobs in Capital Country.

Strengths and growth opportunities for the region

Wallaroo is also part of Destination Southern NSW, one of seven Destination Networks established by the NSW Government to be the ‘shopfront’ for Destination NSW in regional NSW and work closely with local government and a diverse network of visitor economy stakeholders.

Destination Networks are not-for-profit companies limited by guarantee. They are the champions of the visitor economy in their regions, working collaboratively to identify, prioritise and facilitate growth opportunities.

The Destination Southern NSW Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 (DMP) provides a strategic framework to grow, develop and promote visitor experiences in the region, aligning the efforts of stakeholders in line with local context.

The vision of the Destination Southern NSW DMP is underpinned by the following values:

- Ensuring a welcoming, safe, and inclusive region
- Considering responsible tourism – environmental, social, cultural, economic, and ethical
- Retaining our lifestyle, our character and our sense of place
- Fostering a spirit of collaboration within and beyond our regional boundary
- Offering high quality, seamless experiences, and consistent customer services
- Providing opportunities for our industry to broaden and deepen their skill sets.

The DMP identifies the current strengths of the region which include the number and quality of wineries showcasing award-winning cool climate wines including the Canberra District, and the iconic produce of the region complemented by a strong producer and grower environment that enables ‘meet the maker’ experiences.

Southern NSW seeks to position itself as a place that offers bountiful harvest of the land and sea, presented to visitors by the characters that produce it. Further, the sub-region – known as Southern Tablelands, encompassing Capital Country and surrounds – is positioned as a country

location where visitors can unwind, reset and recharge among a region packed with wineries, livestock, fresh produce and the country lifestyle.

Destination NSW recommendations

The visitor economy plays a critical role in the economic and social prosperity of the Capital Country and Southern Tablelands region.

Destination NSW seeks to ensure that the visitor economy, and the many operators who provide visitor experiences that make the region an attractive visitor destination, are considered in the context of proposed developments for the area.

In assessing the Wallaroo Solar Farm development plan, Destination NSW encourages the Independent Planning Commission to consider the following conditions of consent:

Condition 1: Minimise impact on local amenity

Analysis

- The Southern Tablelands region is promoted by Destination NSW as a destination for “pretty farmlands, local eateries dishing up paddock-to-plate produce, scenic towns brimming with history and plenty of natural beauty” (Source: visitnsw.com/destinations/country-nsw).
- Visitor economy stakeholders have expressed concern about changes to the visual landscape that may impact the appeal of the region to prospective visitors.
- Visual mitigation measures implemented by the developer should ensure that any impact on local amenity is minimised to protect the visual appeal of the region.
- Destination NSW acknowledges the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure State Significant Development Assessment Report includes recommended conditions to address the potential residual visual impacts of the project.

Condition 2: Ensure workforce accommodation needs do not impact the supply of visitor accommodation

Analysis

- The accommodation sector is vital to the health and wellbeing of the NSW visitor economy, with accommodation enabling overnight and extended visitor stays.
- As NSW attracts a diverse visitor demographic, it is important that a wide range of accommodation options are available to meet our visitors' requirements.
- In regional areas, short term rental accommodation (STRA) – accommodation in residential homes that is made available to others on a commercial basis for a temporary or short-term period – plays a critical supply role and fills a significant consumer demand gap by providing a variety of accommodation offerings.
- The supply of STRA is not uniform across NSW, nor is the supply of alternate accommodation options for visitors.
- STRA allows for increased amenity and variety for visitors, and sometimes greater flexibility when booking a stay in NSW.
- STRA has a positive impact on local visitor economies, particularly in regional communities where large-scale commercial accommodation is often not available.

- Destination NSW does not support the use of visitor accommodation, including STRA or commercial accommodation properties, without consideration of visitor economy supply needs and consultation with local stakeholders.
- Destination NSW acknowledges the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure State Significant Development Assessment Report recommends an Accommodation and Employment Strategy is prepared in consultation with Council. Destination NSW recommends Destination Southern NSW is also consulted in the development of this strategy.