



NAME REDACTED

OBJECT

Submission No: 189428

Organisation:		<p>Key issues: <i>Land use compatibility, Visual impacts, Biodiversity, Traffic, Water, Noise, Dust, Hazards and risks, Accommodation and workforce, Cumulative impacts, Decommissioning and rehabilitation, Other issues</i></p>
Location: <i>New South Wales 2618</i>		
Submitter Type: <i>an individual making a submission on my own behalf</i>		
Attachment: <i>Submission_Wallaroo Solar Farm.pdf</i>		

Submission date: 7/30/2024 7:56:52 PM

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Independent Planning Commission about the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm. In making this submission, we would like to acknowledge our support for renewable energy sources.

Provisions of rules and regulations that apply to the land to which the proposed development relates

We question whether the proponent properly complied with and undertook the required consultation process in accordance with planning laws.

As NSW landholders who live less than 1km from the proposed development, at no time have we received letters, emails or visits notifying us of exhibitions or information relating to the proposed development from the proponent. On two occasions generic flyers providing information about community meetings relating to the proposed development were placed in our letterbox. However, on both occasions we did not receive these until after the meetings had occurred. Given we check our mailbox 1-2 times per week, it appears they were delivered within days prior to the meetings commencement, at most.

After hearing about the development from neighbours, we searched the Wallaroo Solar Farm website. The information provided there was generic, difficult to understand and inconsistent. For example:

It was unclear whether the traffic data that was displayed for the area represented the time period before, during or after the construction process.

Some map photos were cropped or displayed captions over the top of houses, making it difficult to determine how close the development was located to us and other houses.

The topography of the area appears not to have been considered in the visual impact assessment.

*The proponent's Information Guide on Solar Farms describes the area as *relatively flat* with *low expected visual impact*. However, the proponent's Scoping Report describes the topography as *undulating to hilly with some major gullies*.*

Photos representing the visual impacts that would be incurred by the community were not representative of the perspectives of all surrounding residents, particularly those like us, whose property location sits at a much higher elevation than the proposed development.

Given Richard Everson, from Destination Southern NSW, informed the Commission at its community meeting that they were also not notified of the proposed development, it appears the lack of community consultation may have also extended to other entities.

The suitability of the site for the development

The site's close proximity to Canberra and the lack of any buffer zone between the surrounding suburbs of Dunlop, Flynn and Macgregor raises concerns about resident's safety. Other solar projects have located



themselves well away from existing towns, whereas this one sits on the suburban perimeter of our nation's capital.

- a. Springdale solar farm is 8 km from the town of Sutton
- b. Gunning solar farm is 12km southwest of Gunning
- c. Blind Creek solar farm is 8km northwest of Bungendore
- d. Goonumbla Solar Farm is 10km west of the town of Parkes
- e. Wyalong Solar Farm is 7.5 km northeast of West Wyalong
- f. Williamsdale solar farm is 20 km south of Canberra

There does not appear to be any other solar farms within Australia located this close to suburban homes contained within another state or territory's jurisdiction. If the proposed solar farm at Wallaroo proceeds, it will likely set a precedent for future solar farm locations close to densely populated urban areas.

The proposed site's location brings a high risk of fire to Canberra suburbs as the prevailing wind comes from the west. Residents of Canberra are very aware of fires entering and impacting suburbs from the west, given the 2003 Canberra firestorm that killed four people, injured hundreds and destroyed 510 properties. Afterward, Emergency Service Agency Commissioner Dominic Lane warned Canberrans not to be complacent that such a catastrophic event could never happen again. He cautioned living in the bush capital "comes with an element of risk" and described Canberra as "one of the most fire-prone cities" in the nation.

This elevated risk of fire inherent to the "bush capital" must also be considered in conjunction with the elevated risk for fire internal to a solar farm that houses lithium batteries.

The likely impacts of that development, including environmental impacts on both the natural and built environments, and social and economic impacts in the locality

Environmental

As residents, we are concerned about the collective detrimental effects to the community of contamination to land, water ways and our environment. The proposed site is located within the Ginninderra catchment that carries approximately one quarter of the urban water runoff from Canberra directly into the Murrumbidgee River system and then the Murray. The Murrumbidgee River is an important water source for many wetlands, including Fivebough and Tuckerbill swamps near Leeton, and 16 wetlands listed as nationally significant in the directory of important wetlands. Its water is utilised by many major users that include local councils and water utilities, forestry, tourism, and agriculture, including rice, dairy, wool, wheat, beef, lamb, grapes and citrus. Heavy metal or other contaminants that may leach from the proposed site pose risks to all community water users.

Social

Safety

We hold grave concerns about the impact to traffic safety on Wallaroo, Southwell and Gooroomon Ponds roads and the busy intersection of Wallaroo Rd and the Barton Hwy from any increases to traffic. These narrow single lane roads are regularly used by bike riders, horse riders and runners. The heightened risk of danger imposed by heavy vehicles to these road users, particularly those riding horses -who are flight animals, easily spooked by loud noises, are significant.

At least 5 serious accidents have occurred at the busy Barton Hwy and Wallaroo Rd intersection in the past 2 years. The safety and design of this intersection and its lack of functionality for heavy vehicles has been raised at community meetings and with the ACT government. As heavy vehicle drivers ourselves, when turning right



from Wallaroo Rd towards Canberra, we know it is unsafe to stop in the turn lane, as you cannot see traffic approaching from Yass. I have personally witnessed a number of near misses at this intersection where heavy vehicle drivers were "stuck" in the intersection with no view of the oncoming traffic. With no other option they pulled out blindly, only narrowly missing vehicles. We note on June 27 the proponent supplied the Department with diagrams of proposed changes to this intersection. In our opinion, the suggestions will not address these safety concerns.

We understand the proposal requires that roads be remediated following construction. Given, part of Wallaroo Rd is in the ACT, has an agreement been made with the ACT Government to remediate damages incurred on their section of the road?

Personal wellbeing

Yass Valley Tourism parallels Wallaroo's natural environment with its blue backdrop of the magnificent Brindabella Ranges to that of Italy's beautiful Tuscany region. This scenery regularly draws Australian Capital Territory residents for recreation, entertainment and relaxation purposes. Much research has demonstrated the relationship between scenic environments and positive wellbeing. The consequences of changes to the visual amenity resulting from the development of this solar farm is likely to have significant wellbeing impacts on the social groups who both live in and visit the area.

The poorly communicated consultation, lack of autonomy throughout the process and the unknown impacts that will be incurred within and following the development period has produced significant mental distress in our community.

Moreover, the ongoing uncertainty of possible health risks associated with living in close proximity to a solar installation that may emit electromagnetic radiation poses both current and future risks to the physical and mental health of residents.

The public interest for ecologically sustainable development

We understand that as part of the proposal, there is a financial bond being held by the proponent relating to an agreement between 4 parties (3 current land holders and the proponent) and that this bond is intended for landholders to decommission and remove all solar farm infrastructure. As landholders we are concerned that when the time comes to decommission and remove the infrastructure and remediate the site, parties to the agreement may have changed and the agreement may not be upheld.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Reference links in uploaded document.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Independent Planning Commission about the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm. In making this submission, we would like to acknowledge our support for renewable energy sources.

Provisions of rules and regulations that apply to the land to which the proposed development relates

We question whether the proponent properly complied with and undertook the required consultation process in accordance with planning laws.

As NSW landholders who live less than 1km from the proposed development, at no time have we received letters, emails or visits notifying us of exhibitions or information relating to the proposed development from the proponent. On two occasions generic flyers providing information about community meetings relating to the proposed development were placed in our letterbox. However, on both occasions we did not receive these until after the meetings had occurred. Given we check our mailbox 1-2 times per week, it appears they were delivered within days prior to the meetings commencement, at most.

After hearing about the development from neighbours, we searched the [Wallaroo Solar Farm](#) website. The information provided there was generic, difficult to understand and inconsistent. For example:

- It was unclear whether the traffic data that was displayed for the area represented the time period before, during or after the construction process.
- Some map photos were cropped or displayed captions over the top of houses, making it difficult to determine how close the development was located to us and other houses.
- The topography of the area appears not to have been considered in the visual impact assessment.
- The proponent's [Information Guide on Solar Farms](#) describes the area as "relatively flat" with "low expected visual impact". However, the proponent's [Scoping Report](#) describes the topography as "undulating to hilly with some major gullies".
- Photos representing the visual impacts that would be incurred by the community were not representative of the perspectives of all surrounding residents, particularly those like us, whose property location sits at a much higher elevation than the proposed development.

Given Richard Everson, from Destination Southern NSW, informed the Commission at its community meeting that they were also not notified of the proposed development, it appears the lack of community consultation may have also extended to other entities.

The suitability of the site for the development

The site's close proximity to Canberra and the lack of any buffer zone between the surrounding suburbs of Dunlop, Flynn and Macgregor raises concerns about resident's safety. Other solar projects have located themselves well away from existing towns, whereas this one sits on the suburban perimeter of our nation's capital.

- a. Springdale solar farm is 8 km from the town of Sutton
- b. Gunning solar farm is 12km southwest of Gunning
- c. Blind Creek solar farm is 8km northwest of Bungendore
- d. Goonumbla Solar Farm is 10km west of the town of Parkes

- e. Wyalong Solar Farm is 7.5 km northeast of West Wyalong
- f. Williamsdale solar farm is 20 km south of Canberra

There does not appear to be any other solar farms within Australia located this close to suburban homes contained within another state or territory's jurisdiction. If the proposed solar farm at Wallaroo proceeds, it will likely set a precedent for future solar farm locations close to densely populated urban areas.

The proposed site's location brings a high risk of fire to Canberra suburbs as the prevailing wind comes from the west. Residents of Canberra are very aware of fires entering and impacting suburbs from the west, given the 2003 Canberra firestorm that killed four people, injured hundreds and destroyed 510 properties. Afterward, [Emergency Service Agency Commissioner Dominic Lane warned](#) Canberrans not to be complacent that such a catastrophic event could never happen again. He cautioned living in the bush capital "comes with an element of risk" and described Canberra as "one of the most fire-prone cities" in the nation.

This elevated risk of fire inherent to the "bush capital" must also be considered in conjunction with the elevated risk for fire internal to a solar farm that houses lithium batteries.

The likely impacts of that development, including environmental impacts on both the natural and built environments, and social and economic impacts in the locality

Environmental

As residents, we are concerned about the collective detrimental effects to the community of [contamination to land, water ways and our environment](#). The proposed site is located within the [Ginninderra](#) catchment that carries approximately one quarter of the urban water runoff from Canberra directly into the Murrumbidgee River system and then the Murray. The Murrumbidgee River is an important water source for many wetlands, including Fivebough and Tuckerbill swamps near Leeton, and 16 wetlands listed as nationally significant in the [directory of important wetlands](#). Its water is utilised by many major users that include local councils and water utilities, forestry, tourism, and agriculture, including rice, dairy, wool, wheat, beef, lamb, grapes and citrus. Heavy metal or other contaminants that may leach from the proposed site pose risks to all community water users.

Social

Safety

We hold grave concerns about the impact to traffic safety on Wallaroo, Southwell and Gooroomon Ponds roads and the busy intersection of Wallaroo Rd and the Barton Hwy from any increases to traffic. These narrow single lane roads are regularly used by bike riders, horse riders and runners. The heightened risk of danger imposed by heavy vehicles to these road users, particularly those riding horses -who are flight animals, easily spooked by loud noises, are significant.

At least 5 serious accidents have occurred at the busy Barton Hwy and Wallaroo Rd intersection in the past 2 years. The safety and design of this intersection and its lack of functionality for heavy vehicles has been raised at community meetings and with the ACT government. As heavy vehicle drivers ourselves, when turning right from Wallaroo Rd towards Canberra, we know it is

unsafe to stop in the turn lane, as you cannot see traffic approaching from Yass. I have personally witnessed a number of near misses at this intersection where heavy vehicle drivers were “stuck” in the intersection with no view of the oncoming traffic. With no other option they pulled out blindly, only narrowly missing vehicles. We note on June 27 the proponent supplied the Department with diagrams of proposed changes to this intersection. In our opinion, the suggestions will not address these safety concerns.

We understand the proposal requires that roads be remediated following construction. Given, part of Wallaroo Rd is in the ACT, has an agreement been made with the ACT Government to remediate damages incurred on their section of the road?

Personal wellbeing

[Yass Valley Tourism](#) parallels Wallaroo’s natural environment with its blue backdrop of the magnificent Brindabella Ranges to that of Italy’s beautiful Tuscany region. This scenery regularly draws Australian Capital Territory residents for recreation, entertainment and relaxation purposes. Much [research](#) has demonstrated the relationship between [scenic environments and positive wellbeing](#). The consequences of changes to the visual amenity resulting from the development of this solar farm is likely to have significant wellbeing impacts on the social groups who both live in and visit the area.

The poorly communicated consultation, lack of autonomy throughout the process and the unknown impacts that will be incurred within and following the development period has produced significant mental distress in our community.

Moreover, the ongoing uncertainty of possible health risks associated with living in close proximity to a solar installation that may emit [electromagnetic radiation](#) poses both current and future risks to the physical and mental health of residents.

The public interest for ecologically sustainable development

We understand that as part of the proposal, there is a financial bond being held by the proponent relating to an agreement between 4 parties (3 current land holders and the proponent) and that this bond is intended for landholders to decommission and remove all solar farm infrastructure. As landholders we are concerned that when the time comes to decommission and remove the infrastructure and remediate the site, parties to the agreement may have changed and the agreement may not be upheld.

Thank you for considering this submission.