



RICK & LINDA RUMMERY

OBJECT

Submission No: 187999

Organisation:	Key issues: <i>Land use compatibility, Visual impacts, Traffic, Erosion and sediment control, Water, Noise, Waste, Hazards and risks, Cumulative impacts, Decommissioning and rehabilitation</i>
Location: <i>New South Wales 2618</i>	
Submitter <i>an individual making a submission</i> Type: <i>on my own behalf</i>	
Attachment: <i>WallarooSolarFarmSubmission.pdf</i>	

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Wallaroo Solar Farm Submission - 23 July 2024

1. In Principle: We firmly object to the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm (WSF). We live on Southwell Road in NSW, only a few hundred metres to the north of the proposed site. We support renewables & have our own 10kW solar system on our farm shed. We're not opposed to solar farms in the right location... Wallaroo is simply not the right location. As in any other community, massive projects must always be appropriate & safe. We believe neither is true for this proposed development.

Please note that we have addressed our comments largely from the Wallaroo NSW perspective as this is our personal circumstance. We do however have genuine regard for the many people who live in nearby ACT suburbs who would also be greatly affected if the WFS was to proceed.

2. NIMBY (not in my back yard): Let's address this upfront. We've seen "NIMBY" used derogatively many times in relation to WFS. It's insulting, hurtful to & disrespectful of the genuine concerns that we have towards this project & its impact on us. The same could be said for any other project in any other location. It's so easy for keyboard warriors to hurl NIMBY without any understanding of anyone else's personal situation. You need to walk in someone else's shoes to truly understand them. Just because you object to a project, does not mean that you are witless, dumb, selfish, unimportant or uneducated!

In Wallaroo, we each live in our rural area for many reasons, one of which is a peaceful & quiet lifestyle away from city noise, city traffic, population density, etc. We rely on everyone to not just think of themselves - we must be able to trust others to respect our lives & actively assist in maintaining everyone's peace & amenity. For example, to name just one obvious objection, during the WFS construction phase, peace would be lost with the constant speeding up, gear-changing, slowing down & braking of heavy B-Double trucks... 11 hours per day, 6 days per week, for 18 months.

3. Poor Consultation: Several years ago we heard that a solar farm was proposed in Wallaroo, but not a word has been seen by us since then, despite being located in one of WFS's zones of interest. We don't live under the proverbial rock & question how this proposed development could have progressed so far without our knowledge?

Two weeks ago we were blindsided (to say the very least) to learn that the WFS had essentially been approved pending Independent Planning Commission review. Really? Despite lacking the support of Yass Valley Council & despite many submissions of objection by residents! Despite a Public Meeting being announced with minimal notice, at a location nowhere related to the Wallaroo site, at 10am on a working Thursday, we made the time to attend to find out what was happening.

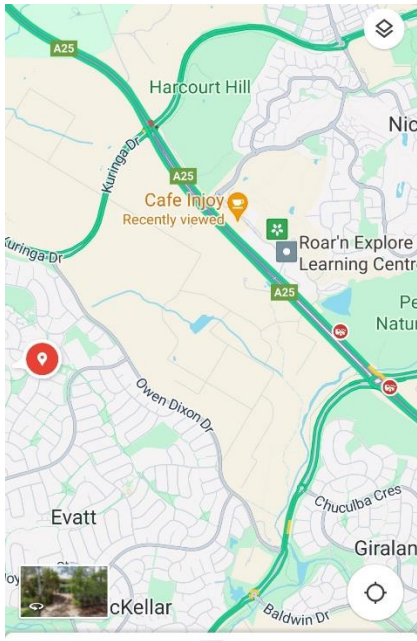
Without doubt we believe that this project seems to have proceeded thus far on the quiet. The purported \$20k "bribes" offered by WFS to the most affected local residents (not us) to keep quiet about their concerns just fuels that opinion. If the project is so good it would be approved on its own merits without WFS feeling the need to offer "hush money" to facilitate the project's approval.

On the matter of poor consultation, were local indigenous communities consulted about the project? If so, who was consulted & what were their responses? WFS's simple "throw-away comment" at the Public Meeting that indigenous people have been consulted & their concerns addressed, is not good enough.

Furthermore, as recent days have progressed, we are also of the understanding that the ACT residents & businesses in close proximity to the WFS were also either not consulted at all or not adequately consulted. Why? ACT people deserve as much consultation & ability to comment as do the residents & business located in Wallaroo. The ACT/NSW border is simply a line on a big map & any development decision that affects people on either side of that border must be a cross-border dual-decision-making process.

4. Alternative & Potentially More Suitable Location: Another potential site for this solar farm is nearby & we doubt it has even been considered. Just a few km from the proposed WFS site in Wallaroo is a large

parcel of vacant land within the ACT (enclosed on 4 sides by the Barton Highway, Kuringa Drive, Owen Dixon Drive & Gundaroo Drive).



This huge parcel of land was previously used by CSIRO & we understand is still owned by the Commonwealth Government. The land is easily accessible by vehicles of all sizes from existing main roads & is surrounded by a very wide band of mature trees that would eliminate anyone's view of solar panels (two primary concerns of Wallaroo residents). In fact, unless you knew a solar farm had been built there most people would not know it was there.

Given that our governments at all levels are keen to tick boxes to create renewable energies to meet targets, does it not make sense for those same governments to build this solar farm on their own land to therefore:

- not need to pay massive lease payments to private landholders to use their site
- avoid the creation of an unfair de-valuation of Wallaroo taxpayers' private rural homes & land, &
- in future years, use their own significant government legal & financial resources to enforce the developer's removal of end-of-life solar farm structures & the subsequent remediation of the underlying land, or at least be in a better position than residents could ever be to bear those potentially enormous costs & tasks themselves.

When queried, it was mentioned by WSF's Ben Cranston at the Public Meeting on 18th July 2024, that a bond had been agreed with the site landholders for end-of-life remediation of the WFS site. What is the value & terms of that bond? Where will the money be kept? What assurances to ACT/NSW residents have that anything will actually be done by the developer, or failing that, by the landholder?

If government make the final decision to "build" a solar farm, then government should bear the cost to "un-build" that solar farm. Local residents must never be left with the problem or cost of remediation. In this case, what will happen if WSF's international developer is no longer viable or even still present in Australia to do the remediation themselves? If so, Wallaroo residents may need to fund the huge expense of remediation themselves &/or face an even greater 100% devaluation of their homes & land.

Please at least consider this potentially more suitable site & commence a more thorough consultative process than has occurred for the proposed Wallaroo site. Residents in the alternative location would no doubt have their own set of objections & rightly so. Over time, that consultation process would uncover the suitability or otherwise of that different site for a solar farm.

5. Reduced Value & Equity for Wallaroo Properties: Three real estate professionals attended the 18th July 2024 Public Meeting on WSF, all of which are well-respected & have extensive local experience. It was suggested that a property value reduction of 20-30% could be expected by Wallaroo residents if WSF proceeds (for most properties this would equate to a decline of at least \$500k). I would expect a similar % decline in value would be experienced by nearby ACT home owners.

THAT IS SIMPLY NOT ACCEPTABLE!

Yes, for Wallaroo residents, there are many reasons why our rural properties are valuable (proximity to Canberra, amazing views, good pasture, lifestyle, space, etc). Value is not just measured in \$ but also in amenity.

There are 3 issues to address in relation to \$ value of our properties:

- **Sale Price:** The loss in value of our properties would easily be seen by a lower sale price when/if we sell our homes. Any real estate agent would agree that if you make an area less appealing you get fewer interested buyers, therefore less buyer competition & therefore a lower sale price. Supply & Demand.
- **Lost Equity:** It is not just about sale price. The loss of value in our homes can directly affect us all while still living in them. Personally, the amount of equity we've built in our home over the past 21 years is ours to access & use in future years as we see fit. eg. to draw & live on in retirement, to enter aged care when/if needed, to meet large medical expenses, to assist family with their own property purchase, to leave to our family in our wills. We worked very hard for many years to be able to purchase our rural property & continue to work even harder to pay for it & maintain it. Why should WSF have any ability whatsoever to potentially reduce our financial security? It genuinely feels like our money is being stolen from us.
- **Bank Foreclosure:** This can apply to anyone if the value of their mortgaged property becomes insufficient to continue to meet their bank's lending criteria. For instance, if a resident in Wallaroo has recently purchased their property with an 80% mortgage, & the value of their property reduces by the suggested 20-30% (if WSF proceeds), the bank providing that mortgage may forcefully sell that property to clear the debt. This would be a very real & very stressful concern for some Wallaroo residents.

Why should WSF have any ability at all to potentially reduce our financial security in either circumstance?

It has been mentioned that the WSF is a "transfer of wealth". We agree... the lost \$ that each of the residents here may experience will be pocketed by the developer & landowners where WSF is built.

Will the developer, landowner or NSW Government pay each of us an equivalent of our decline in value or are we expected to simply just cop it?

This is indeed personal.

6. Road Safety: The day-to-day safety of residents, visitors, tourists & other road users **MUST** also be uppermost in the WSF decision-making process. If this development proceeds, we're worried, stressed & fearful for the safety of anyone driving in/out of our area.

This area of Wallaroo has "one road in & one road out" (ie. Wallaroo Road). All vehicles, especially big heavy ones, become everyone's concern after they leave the Barton Highway & enter our rural neighbourhood. We have narrow roads, many bends, potholes galore, concealed driveways (some on unbroken lines) & raised sections of road that have nowhere to get off the road to make way for wide vehicles (notably in this case the section of Wallaroo Road between the Barton Highway & Gooromon Ponds bridge, along which ALL vehicles must travel to get to the WSF site). We have school children getting on/off

various bus runs during the day, elderly & disabled residents, regular Learner Drivers, tourists, horse riders, walkers & groups of cyclists.

7. Clarification of Intended Site Access: WSF proposes all vehicles will access the site via the Barton Highway, then Wallaroo Road, then Gooromon Ponds Road & onto an extended Southwell Road.

Is the Gooromon Ponds Rd bridge strong enough to carry the proposed increased traffic, especially heavy B-Double trucks? We understand that the bridge was built in the 1960's for rural access, not today's fully-laden B-Double trucks. As a "one road in & one road out" locality, any damage that prevents us using that bridge is not OK & in fact dangerous.

From Yass Council's website, & as shown on the road sign at the entrance to it, Gooromon Ponds Rd has a 5 tonne vehicle limit. Unless significant roadworks to upgrade that road are to be undertaken by the developer (at their expense), this restriction clearly excludes that access road for WSF's heavy vehicles. Has this as yet been identified &/or considered in the decision-making process? If not, would that therefore, post development approval, result in those B-Double trucks using Wallaroo/Southwell Rd access instead? (despite WFS's Ben Cranston ruling that route out at the 18 July 2024 Public Meeting due to land remediation activities along that route).

Or would WSF create a route through the landowner's property from Belconnen ACT into the site? Please clarify so all residents are fully aware of the intended site access.

Personally, we want to address our added concerns if a change of route onto Southwell Rd eventuates. Given the poor consultation process so far, we may not have an opportunity to comment on this issue again. If a route change eventuates we would have a significantly increased danger at our property gate. Southwell Rd is narrow & raised so we always wait at our front gate until vehicles pass before entering Southwell Rd. Although we easily see vehicles approaching from the left along Southwell Rd (eg. heavily-laden B-Double trucks as they would drive toward the WSF site), there is a "blind-spot" to the right of our front gate as we leave our property (see image below). We've almost been "cleaned up" several times by fast-paced vehicles travelling towards us from that direction. It is impossible to clearly see a vehicle coming (or for them to see us) & it is also impossible to gain sufficient speed to get ahead of it on the road to avoid a rear-end collision. We have raised this with Yass Valley Council numerous times & leave our property **EVERY TIME** in fear of a collision!!



We cannot see trucks coming & they cannot see us.

An elderly lady from Canberra agists racehorses on our property & visits every day to feed them. She turns

into the above blind-spot on Southwell Rd every day & we are concerned for her safety. She also has a second group of horses agisted on another property across the road from us & further along Southwell Rd towards WSF. That horse paddock can only be accessed from Southwell Rd. With no parking, she does her best to pull her car off to the steep edge of the raised Southwell Rd but still becomes very vulnerable to traffic. On many occasions she has mentioned vehicles buzzing past her without the courtesy of giving her space or slowing down.

We have no words for the fear & distress Linda encountered late in 2020 when faced with a fast-paced truck&dog on the wrong side of Wallaroo Rd heading downhill & straight for her. Linda used one hand to reef her small car to the left off the road to try to avoid it & the other hand to firmly sound the car horn. The truck driver heard that (thank God or we doubt Linda would be here now). Linda can still vividly still see him lift his head (she thinks he was possibly texting on his phone) & raise his elbow turning the wheel to return to his side of the road.

We of course do not want any family, friends or visitors injured or killed... too many close calls here already.

The sheer volume of vehicles involved in the WSF development brings a completely different level of fear for our safety & well-being!

When assessing this development we ask that you closely consider all of the above in the interests of all residents & visitors to our rural neighbourhood. The potential risk to road-users ***MUST*** be substantially reduced & we seek an assurance that it would be done. Some suggestions: (1) specific resident issues addressed in a truck driver induction program (eg. gate blind-spots), (2) reduced speed limit for all heavy vehicles immediately after they leave the Barton Highway for the entire period they are within our closed neighbourhood (& reliably enforced by a regular Police presence), (3) new Concealed Driveway signage for properties such as ours, (4) independent monitoring of daily truck frequencies to ensure adherence to any actual approval, (5) regular spot-checks of truck road-worthiness condition by road authorities, (6) monitoring of truck speed by Police (rare!).

Clearly, should WSF proceed, we have no ability to continue to live safely in our rural area. We understand that many residents (& also people who do not actually live in Wallaroo) have already submitted their road safety concerns. We are convinced that it will take a death on our roads for anyone to actually listen or create change. If any of our loved ones are injured or worse, we assure you that all people involved in this project will be held accountable.

8. Heavy Vehicle Frequency & Speed: The proposed frequency of WSF's heavily-laden B-Double trucks is excessive for a quiet residential rural area. In recent years we have already experienced a VASTLY increased movement of large land-fill trucks along Wallaroo & Southwell Rds, mostly heading for properties along Brooklands Road.

To put it mildly, the proposed volume of truck movements for the WSF would also be massive. An "average" number of truck movements per day is unsatisfactory. That can easily be manipulated to 300 one day, 2 the next, 150 the next, etc, to average out to whatever number the developer wants to achieve over a period of time. Residents in this area should be able to rely on MAXIMUM daily truck movements which are enforced.

Who actually monitors and/or enforces an 18 month time period, or indeed the number of truck movements per day? What would stop the developer gaining approval & then getting "stuck in" to the project to get it finished in one month (for example) thus making trucks movements exponentially higher & more invasive within our neighbourhood? Trucks could potentially deliver constantly throughout the day, no

breaks at all. Dozens & dozens of trucks, one after the other, could line up waiting for their turn to unload at WSF, creating more bottlenecks & hazards for other road users than we would already be experiencing.

What control measures (& consequences for the developer) would be implemented to ensure WSF was constructed in accordance with the details of any approval? Will these measures include permanent speed cameras &/or vehicle counters?

9. Road Maintenance & Repairs: A few years ago, local residents at that time made significant personal financial contributions to Yass Valley Council to fund the sealing of Southwell & Brooklands Rds. Will Gooromon Ponds Road residents also be asked to do so to make that road accessible for WSF's heavy vehicles? Given our experience, it is reasonable to assume that damage to our privately-funded road/s will be unavoidable due to the extremely large number of WSF's vehicle movements, especially the heavy B-Double trucks. There are already road maintenance issues pending in our neighbourhood, reasonably contributed to by the large number of trucks we've seen on our roads in recent years:

1. Pot-holes have appeared, some repaired, re-appeared & remain unfilled
2. Reflector guide posts have been flattened & have still not been replaced
3. Significant road edge erosion exists on the corner of Wallaroo & Southwell Rds - it is hazardous to turn left from Wallaroo Road onto Southwell Rd at any speed, the need to sufficiently slow down to navigate pot-holes & eroded edges is very dangerous especially if another vehicle is travelling closely behind
4. Much loose gravel is at the T-Intersections of Wallaroo/Southwell Rds & also Wallaroo/Gooromon Ponds Rds - empty trucks travelling at high speed brake very hard to change roads & we would be very surprised if there has not already been a collision with another vehicle at either intersection (at our nearest intersection we often hear the screeching of brakes & tyres skidding in the loose gravel when brakes lock up)

If the WSF is approved at any point in time, we ask for a mandatory & legally enforceable written agreement that clearly states who will pay for road upgrade &/or rectification works (it must not be residents, but will it be the Developer? Yass Valley Council? NSW Govt?) & an enforceable time-frame for the completion of those upgrades/rectifications. We paid for roadworks once & are certainly not interested in doing so again.

10. Fire & Contamination: Solar batteries burn fiercely & firefighters battle to put them out with chemicals that contaminate the land & waterways. Such fires can not only reduce vehicle access (& escape routes), but also spread to neighbouring areas, release contaminants in the smoke & the firefighting chemicals have been proven to poison land (litigation against the Australian Defence Force has been recently brought by landholders in various states & territories). With "one road in & one road out", how do Wallaroo residents leave if cut off by fire? We note that WSF are offering donations to Wallaroo Fire Brigade – is that because they recognise they may need their services?

11. The Land - Vegetation Management, Pest & Animal Management & Water Runoff: A vital part of responsibly owning rural land is the correct management of that land & everything on it. Landholders need to appropriately deal with water runoff, rabbits, wild dogs, weeds, etc.

Who would be responsible for the effective day-to-day management of the underlying land at the Wallaroo Solar Farm?

We have heard that sheep will graze the property – will they be fenced in various paddocks & regularly rotated to correctly manage the vegetation to prevent overgrazing & potential soil erosion, will there be sheep yards to facilitate pickup & drop off of sheep, will the sheep be regularly drenched & shorn & if so

how will they be rounded up to do that (we can only imagine how difficult it would be to round them up along rows of solar panels)?

Wild animals (eg. dogs & rabbits) must be removed from the land. How will this be achieved? Wild & stray dogs attack sheep. Firearms cannot be used without the obvious risk to residents in either rural Wallaroo or suburban ACT localities, & we would expect that WSF would not want firearms used among their fragile solar panels. Poison must be used in accordance with NSW land use restrictions – who will manage this?

What processes would the WSF developer put in place to deal with water runoff from the underlying land, especially given that contaminants may be shed by the solar panels &/or batteries (especially in the event of fire)?

- At the Public Meeting, we heard from a guest speaker who travelled a significant distance from Griffith NSW. He raised the potential contamination of the Murrumbidgee River catchment zone which delivers water to their growing area, a major Australian food bowl. What would WSF intend to implement onsite to eliminate the risk of contaminated water runoff? How would they be held liable if such a disaster were to eventuate?
- Will a base line contaminant study be conducted of the land now before commencing the project & will that study be repeated at regular intervals of the operation of the solar farm? Will those results be made available to residents?

12. Capacity to Feed-in to the Existing Electricity Grid: We do not pretend to be solar experts, but would like clarification on something. For our own 10kW solar system, our inverter limits the amount of electricity we can feed into the Essential Energy Grid to 5kW at any given time (any excess above this amount “fizzes off”). It was explained to us that the grid cannot “cope” with any higher feed-in that would arc the powerlines & create heat, sparks/fires & outages. If that is indeed true, how can WSF create mega amounts of electricity (exponentially more than any resident could) & be able to feed-in to the existing grid without those same issues?

Why not enable all of us across NSW/ACT with current solar systems on our properties to be able to feed-in whatever kWh we already make?

Does Wallaroo’s existing power line/pole infrastructure need to be upgraded or extras installed that we have not been told about? If so, what are those changes & where would they be located?

13. Insurance Premiums: Yet to be addressed satisfactorily is the potential increase to our property insurance premiums due to our proximity to WSF. The project will potentially increase a fire & contamination risk to our properties. Will our insurers be OK with that or will they want extra \$ each year to mitigate their potential exposure to claims? Furthermore, we do we stand if a fire starts on our property that subsequently spreads to the Wallaroo Solar Farm & damages it... would WSF indemnify us from that liability if it occurs?

In closing, we hope that you will read our concerns in full & actually listen to what is being said by many concerned people located on both sides of the ACT/NSW border. Following your detailed review, if the Independent Planning Commission does decide that the Wallaroo Solar Farm will be approved to proceed, please address each of our concerns within that context so we can consider our positions with the degree of knowledge that to date we feel we have not had.