



VANESSA JONES

OBJECT

Submission No: 189440

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| Organisation: | | <i>Energy transition, Land use compatibility, Visual impacts, Traffic, Water, Noise, Hazards and risks, Decommissioning and rehabilitation</i> |
| Location: | <i>New South Wales 2618</i> | |
| Submitter Type: | <i>an individual making a submission on my own behalf</i> | |
| Attachment: | <i>2nd submission re Wallaroo Solar Farm - July 2024.docx</i> | |

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Submitted as an attachment

Submission to IPC re SSD 9261283

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the IPC regarding the proposed Wallaroo solar Farm.

In making this submission I would like to acknowledge that I am not opposed to alternative renewable energy sources.

The community of Wallaroo are concerned regarding the scale of the proposed development for a number of reasons.

The lack of information provided to the majority of local residents regarding any information relating to the proposed development from either parties involved is a major concern. The timing of the distribution of the information received, was generally after the meetings had occurred. It must be noted that my mailbox is checked daily.

This proposed development will not only affect Wallaroo residents, it is going to heavily impact on the residents of North Belconnen, Canberra, especially residents in Dunlop, as the proposed development is only approximately 800 metres or so from that suburb.

The suitability of the proposed site and its proximity to residential areas is a huge concern. The lack of any buffer zone between the Canberra suburbs raises concerns for safety. Many other solar projects have been located well away from existing regional towns, let alone capital cities. Yet you propose to locate this on the edge of the suburbs of our National Capital.

There are a number of existing solar farms located an acceptable distance of 8-12kms from regional towns. From my research there does not appear to be any solar farms within Australia located this close to suburban homes. If you proceed with this location, it is likely that this could set a precedent for future development. The NSW Land and Environment Court recently knocked back an application on its impact to "scenic quality" and the intrusion into the landscape (Mudgee proposed development).

The proposed site location brings a high risk of fire risk to Canberra, which is already at high risk. As experienced in the 2003 bushfires. This increases the risk as our prevailing winds come from the west. In this area, we have "one road in and one road out". We, as residents, understand that there is an element of risk, living where we choose to live, but we all manage the risk accordingly. We do not need to have unknown factors added to this equation.

There are substantial issues involved with trying to contain lithium battery fires (should they occur) and no efficient way to control them. This raises immense concerns, not only for Wallaroo residents, but the suburbs in close proximity of the proposed solar farm and the possibility of toxic gases, hazardous fumes which could be involved should there be a fire.

I am of the belief that there is a 5km "buffer zone" in NSW from residential areas. On page 4 of the council minutes from 29/6/2023, this was mentioned. The development of this proposed solar farm is inconsistent with the Yass Valley Council Settlement Strategy, which currently has this area as rural zoning within the 5km buffer zone. This proposal does not take into consideration the Ginninderry development or the proposed Parkwood area in NSW. It must be noted that ALL Councillors agreed with the comments and not one was against this statement.

There are significant concerns for the impact that this development would have on our environment and the detrimental effects to our local community and the community in Belconnen.

Contamination of the land, the waterways and our environment and the impact on the Fauna and Flora of the area, in particular the Golden Sun Moth (GSM) – Lot 2, Wallaroo Road. This is referred to in the Gooromon Grasslands offset Management Plan 2018-2016. Environmental Conservation (ACT Government Reference # EPBC 2010/5520).

The proposed site located within the catchment of Ginninderra and Gooromon Ponds, which flow directly into the Murrumbidgee River system. And onto the Murray. Should there be any contamination, this would then affect all other areas, downstream. Importantly the Wetlands, farming, local council's water, tourism, forestry and agriculture (citrus, rice etc), just to name a few. Contaminates leaching from this proposed site could pose huge risks to all communities and the ability to sustain their livelihoods. This would put further burdens onto the governments. The question that really needs to be asked and answered is "Is the Wallaroo Solar Farm being located in the best possible location"? I am of the opinion that due diligence with regard to the location has not been undertaken. If the ACT's proposed movement of the border goes ahead, then the location of the Wallaroo Solar Farm would be right in the centre of that. Also a mention should be that the location is in the vicinity of the National Bicentennial Trail.

I also understand that, as part of the proposal, there is a "bond" between the landholders and the developer. With this bond, it is intended that the landholders are responsible to "decommission and remove" all solar infrastructure at the end of the time. My concern is that when this time comes, they may not be the same parties that were involved initially at the time of this "bond". Should this be the case, the "bond" would not be "upheld". With this being said, who gets to do the clean up?

The proposed construction will have a significant impact on the safety of the local people and their families. Construction traffic will dramatically increase on both Gooromon Ponds Road and Southwell Road. There will not be only normal car traffic, but a large number of trucks (including B-double trucks), all on our local roads and a bridge that were not designed to sustain such weight or volume of traffic and movement. Our local roads are narrow, typically single lane, country roads and are used by bike riders, horse riders and runners. Most importantly the school bus run. At present there is very limited room on the shoulders of the roads for the bus to pull off safely to allow children to board or disembark safely. The increased traffic will substantially affect the safety and wellbeing of these children, twice a day and significantly increase the risks to them.

Of equal concern is the intersection of the Barton Highway and Wallaroo Road. This intersection is already troublesome and there have been a number of accidents. This intersection lacks sever functionality for any heavy vehicles. It is unsafe for heavy vehicles to turn right from Wallaroo Road towards Canberra and they are unable to stop in the centre. If they do, it is impossible to see the traffic approaching from Yass. I do understand that there have been discussions to rectify this intersection, however, has there been any agreement with the ACT Government? Upgrades should be finalised to all roads concerned that would be impacted by this development. It needs to be noted that Gooromon Ponds Road has a 5-ton limit. This work should be finalised prior to any progress on the Wallaroo Solar Farm.

I did pose the question of how the workers would be travelling to the proposed site and I was advised that this would be by bus, oh well and good, however, they mentioned that the bus would be a 12-seater. Can you guess how many trips that would be necessary to ferry approximately 250 workers involved in this project? Again, further increasing the traffic on the country roads, which sees little or no maintenance.

The Wallaroo area and its beautiful natural surroundings is why I moved here in the first place. This area frequently entices ACT residents and interstate visitors to it. They are visiting the area for relaxation and personal space. There are a significant number of beautiful and successful winery businesses in the area. All of which will be greatly affected by the establishment of this proposed solar farm. The development will seriously impact on the visual outlook for the community as a whole. There has been research undertaken which has demonstrated a relationship between scenic environments and people's wellbeing.

The Mudgee Council and local landholders recently won their objection for the location of a solar farm on the grounds of scenic quality and the close proximity to residential housing. Such an eyesore cannot be hidden by plantings due to the land formation of the area. This is exactly what the residents of Wallaroo and the surrounding area are talking about.

Considering the size of Australia, there are certainly more suitable sites for a development of this size, elsewhere, where there would be no impact on residents or rural residential areas.

It is common knowledge within the Wallaroo community that a number of local residents were offered a certain monetary incentive (and I use this term very loosely) to sign a contract to agree to support the construction of the Wallaroo Solar Farm. I hear that the dollar value varied from \$10,000 to \$100,000. I am assuming that the dollar value equated to the proximity of your property to the solar farm. You were required not to disclose the amount provided to you. It was also stated, that, should you accept the offer and sign the contract, if you were to sell your property, you were required to give the money and the contract to the new owners. Surely this contravenes some legal aspects of development, not to mention local and government laws. Apart from these terms, as a landholder who signed, there was "no comeback" to the developer, should there be any issues, such as a fire or contamination occurring. I found this form of "incentive" (call it what you like), totally unacceptable and disgusting. The only person who would benefit from this practice would be the developer. So underhanded that it is reprehensible. There should be consequences to the developer who instigated such a proposal and I do hope that there is.

This whole process has been poorly communicated and managed and the lack of consolation throughout it, is reprehensible. The timing of any public meetings or consultation is a true reflection on the lack of any consideration to the local residents (and those in ACT). The most recent meeting, held on 18 July 2024, was, as you are aware, on a Thursday morning (10am). This was at the end of the school holidays and a work day and to "add insult to injury", held in Murrumbateman, which is not directly impacted by the proposed development. Due to the timing and location, many local residents were unable to attend. One can only conclude that this may have been deliberate.

The uncertainty of any possible health risks associated with living in such close proximity to a solar installation of this size is unknown and will pose current and future risks to the mental and physical wellbeing of residents in the areas concerned. What will be the lasting effects of any emissions which may be produced during the life of any solar farms or the general noise associate with their operation? Has there been any impact statements undertaken around existing solar farms in rural residential areas?

It has been confirmed by two real estate experts that we can expect property values to drop by 15 – 30%.

There was a MOU signed on 9/11/2016 by M. Baird, NSW Government and A. Barr, ACT Government on 9/12/2016, regarding a cross-border understanding. In this document it stated that there would be consultation on significant impact on, or in conflict with land – future growth and uses that would

significantly affect the scenic quality and landscape character. The proposed site for the Wallaroo Solar Farm, definitely will have a huge impact, not just for Wallaroo residents, it will also greatly impact the Belconnen North Community of the ACT.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Regards

Vanessa Jones.

Steven and Ashleigh Swift.