

Middlebrook Solar Farm – IPC Public Meeting Submission

My name is Robyn Wealand. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

I'm sure the majority in the room would agree, we are not against renewable energy. This should be about making smart choices. Choices which result in the best outcomes for our community as a whole and Tamworth as a successful agricultural, sporting and tourist destination.

Why would we risk destroying the very nature and outlook of Tamworth with the construction of a project which will only be producing significant power for at most 20 years and need to be decommissioned or upgraded after 30. Where is the forward thinking and security for our agricultural and tourist industries which have been growing exponentially for many years. Why would we allow the very nature of the Loomberah district as the entrance to our city to be marred by a sea of solar panels and risk everything Tamworth has been working towards.

For 52 years we have hosted the largest country music Festival in the southern hemisphere. Tourists come to Tamworth to enjoy a true country experience. Their expectations are of vast areas of seasonal crops and grazing cattle and sheep. How much consideration has been given to the impact this will surely have on future tourism and the large financial contribution it makes to the Tamworth economy.

ALEC, which is only a short distance from the planned solar project, is host to State, National and international horse events on almost a weekly basis.

The Loomberah area is now home to dozens of successful horse breeding and training operations with high demand and potential to continue this growth.

Data recently released announced that the horse industry brings more income into the Tamworth area than any other business, including the music festival. This being the case, we should be working to protect and encourage growth to this industry. The zoning for small block subdivisions in the southern area of Tamworth is already set to allow this industry to scale up. The placement of large scale solar in Loomberah will surely put a halt to this expanding industry.

I believe it is critical that we make the right choices, smart decisions, about where solar projects are located. A moratorium on the use of any highly productive farmland should be immediately put in place. I believe we have already lost too much valuable land. It is clear that there is an abundance of land more appropriate for solar development in NSW. Land which could offer owners a reliable income when farm production is limited by soil quality and unreliable rainfall.

Properties included in the Middlebrook project have been successful, highly productive operations for generations and should be preserved. Worldwide demand for food is continuing to increase and yet we are planning to destroy the land on which it is grown. Millions of dollars have been invested in planning, researching and setting up REZ zones throughout NSW. For reasons unknown to us, these plans have apparently been abandoned to allow renewable projects to be approved well outside these boundaries.

By abandoning the RES zones we are now faced with the adhoc placement of renewable projects resulting in widespread uncertainty and impacting on far too many towns and communities.

Property owners surrounding solar projects are already suffering huge losses in property values. There is already evidence locally that properties are taking longer to sell and vendors left no alternative but to drop prices considerably to achieve a sale. Other owners having their property on the market for some time have experienced buyers walking away as soon as the location of a solar project is disclosed.

In granting approval to projects, our Planning Department needs to consider all stakeholders in the costing of a development.

Surrounding land holders should not be forced to accept losses to property values, their lives disrupted during years of construction, without financial compensation. The offers of compensation being tabled are nothing short of insulting.

I have lived in Loomberah for over 20 years. During that time I've owned three properties. All of them in this district. When looking for a farm throughout much of NSW and ultimately making the decision to relocate to Tamworth, I was told that the premier district was the favoured Loomberah area. With rich soils, safe rainfall, a closeknit community and natural beauty, it was an easy decision. The first farm being on the eastern boundary of the Middlebrook project. As a generational farmer, I can join with the Middlebrook community in understanding how they are feeling. How passionately they are about farming, the deep connection they have with their land and what it means to them.

Thank you.