

MR A. HUTTON: Okay. Well, we might officially start so good morning, and welcome along today. Thank you for coming. Before we begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal People. I'd also like to pay my respects to the elders past and present, and to the
5 elders from other communities who may be here today. Welcome to this meeting today. UPC Renewables, the applicant, is seeking to develop a new 720 megawatt solar farm and battery storage facility located six kilometres west of Uralla, and eight kilometres south of Armidale in the New England North West Region of New South
10 Wales.

My name is Andrew Hutton. I'm the Chair for this UPC panel. Joining me are my fellow Commissioners, Professor Zada Lipman and Professor Snow Barlow. Brad James is here in person from the Secretariat, as is Stephen Barry on the phone; I should have acknowledged Steve is here, um, also attending the meeting. In the
15 interests of openness and transparency, and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting will be recorded and a full transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website. This meeting is one part of the Commission's decision making process. It is taking place at the preliminary stages of the process, and will form one of several of sources of information upon which the
20 Commission will base its decision.

It is important for the Commissioners to ask questions of attendees, and to clarify issues whenever we consider it is appropriate. If you are asked a question and you're not in a position to answer it please feel free to take the question on notice, and
25 provide any additional information in writing which we'll also put up on our website.

Um, just as we start speaking today for the benefit of the transcript, if you could introduce yourselves before you speak, ah, the first time, and – and just ensure that we don't speak over each other, um, as we're going through, just to ensure accuracy
30 of the transcript so we'll now begin. So thank you, for coming along; much appreciated. Obviously, we're quite keen just to hear a bit about, um, I guess, the project from your perspective, um, and just talk around some of the key issues, I guess, or aspects as part of the, um, the assessment report that you completed so I was pretty much going to hand to you initially to give us a bit of an intro, and then
35 we'll ask questions as we move through the process of

MS N. BREWER: So Nicole Brewer, director of Energy Assessments. Thank you, for the opportunity to discuss the assessment report. Um, the findings are summarised in our assessment report, um, to New England Solar. We visited the
40 site, we consulted Council, ah, and other relevant agencies. We exhibited the project, and we've assessed, based on all of that information, um, the merits of the project in detail so it's the department's view that it's, ah, an approvable project, that there are benefits from the point of view of renewable energy, providing battery
45 storage.

Um, you know, it's a large solar farm that, ah, we consider has been well designed with setbacks from resident's clusters. Um, the amendments have led to better outcomes for the project, ah, and it's located in the New England, ah, Renewable Energy Zone, and you can see from the figure which is in our, um, um, on screen that
5 it's – it's in a quite a key location where it's the, ah, confluence of two, ah, transmission lines so the North South Transmission Line connecting, ah, Queensland and New South Wales as well as the East West Transmission Line.

MR HUTTON: Nicole, sorry, just for the benefit of, um, the transcript, could you
10 provide us with those figures or indicate - indicate those figures at the end of the meeting so we can include in the information - - -

MS BREWER: Sure.

15 MR HUTTON: - - - just so a

PROF S. BARLOW: Where does the East West connector go?

MS BREWER: The East West from – so that's the one from Coffs Harbour through
20 to Tamworth.

PROF BARLOW: Okay.

MR HUTTON: Yes.
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PROF BARLOW: Yes.

MS BREWER: Um, and the - - -

30 PROF BARLOW: The Queensland connector goes?

MS BREWER: The Queensland connector, so there are existing North and transmission lines.

35 PROF BARLOW: Yes.

MS BREWER: The green line is the proposed Queensland inter-connector so that green, um, shaded area.

40 PROF BARLOW: Okay.

MS BREWER: So in that sense it's in a, ah, a good strategic location.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.
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MS BREWER: Um, Council supports the project. Um, no agency has objected to the project, um, and there are benefits of the project obviously from, ah, the

construction jobs and investment in the region. Our assessment report considered, ah, some – that the – the key issues were visual and traffic and agriculture, and we consider that the impacts of these are acceptable, um, particularly with the project changes, and that the residual issues really could be addressed through, ah, our
5 recommended conditions.

Um, so we understand that the Commissioners from the agenda had some, ah, some questions, ah, or areas of clarification so I'm happy to – to discuss any – any areas.

10 MR HUTTON: Thank you. Um, just to pick up on the one, ah, key point initially, the – obviously there was a process of reviewing the – the initial project application, and there was an amended, ah, project put forward, we're just interested to hear about, um, your awareness of any extra consultation or opportunity for comment
15 from the community on the amended proposal. Ah, we note in the documentation that the department didn't re, um, exhibit, um, but we're just keen to get some feedback on your reports around that process given there was such a – a big change, albeit, um, addressing a number of concerns that people had.

MS BREWER: Um, sure. So look, the – the changes were, yes, removing the – the
20 Southern array area, and increasing some of the setbacks, looking at some of the transport routes, removing the accommodation, um, camp. We considered that the amendments did reduce the impact, um, and made the document available, um, publicly online, and we didn't receive any representations. We consider that given that the – the changes reduce the impact there wasn't anything new that needed
25 comment from the community - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MS BREWER: - - - but it was available online should people wish to – to make a
30 comment, um, and we understand also that the, ah, proponent did consultation - - -

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS BREWER: - - - around the timing of that amendment report as well.
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MR HUTTON: Yep, okay, and we've – we've obviously got the opportunity to talk to them soon so we'll ask that question.

MS BREWER: Mmm.
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PROF BARLOW: How long was it available online before?

MS BREWER: Um, when we received – since when we received it?

45 PROF BARLOW: Yeah, it was dated June, wasn't it, yeah?

MS BREWER: Yes, so - - -

MR HUTTON: The amendment?

PROF BARLOW: June '19, yeah, so it's been there a while?

5 MS BREWER: Yes, that's right.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

PROF BARLOW: Thank you.

10

MR HUTTON: Okay. One of the, um, one of the issues that you've identified is, um, agriculture as a key issue, and we've had a look at some preliminary information as well. The first question that we have is with respect to the BSAL lands that are – have been identified in the are you aware whether they were, um, they relied on
15 the mapped BSAL or whether there was a – a process of verification in the field to look at that mapping?

MS BREWER: My understanding is that yes, that did rely on the mapping.

20 MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS BREWER: Um, and that those areas are identified as small areas through the site.

25 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: Um, so the majority of the site is classed 4 or 5, and that there's about 100 hectares of the – the BSAL.

30 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: Um, so that's the – which is a bit hard to see on the figure - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

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MS BREWER: - - - but it's the grey dotted area but it's in very small strips - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

40 MS BREWER: - - - through the array - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

45 MS BREWER: - - - um, and that that wouldn't provide, um, you know, a consolidated, ah, patch of land that could be principally for productive use.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR I. DAVIES: Um, Iwan Davies at the time, and I think it's also worth noting, um, as you, um, will have read in the report, that the applicant, ah, by removing that Southern array, I think removed 570 hectares of – of BSAL - - -

5 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MR DAVIES: - - - um, and which left, I think, 270, um, hectares of BSAL within the remainder of the project boundary - - -

10 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MR DAVIES: - - - um, of which only 100 hectares would be – would be impacted.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

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MS BREWER: I guess the department considers that the inherent land capability, um, wouldn't be affected, and that the – it could be rehabilitated following decommissioning and the removal of infrastructure, and we've got conditions in there to, um, rehabilitate to the land capability to its pre-existing use in – with a particular focus on that those areas of BSAL are, ah, rehabilitated back to a class 3 maintained ability.

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

25 MR DAVIES: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. So that – that the return of the land post operation is – the criteria mainly focused around the BSAL land; did you give regard to the other land as well in terms of turning it back to a suitable farming outcome?

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MS BREWER: So the outcomes talk to the land capability generally - - -

MR HUTTON: Right.

35 MS BREWER: - - - to its pre-existing use - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - including that the BSAL land - - -

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - is at least back to class 3.

45 MR HUTTON: Class 3, yeah, okay.

MS BREWER: Yeah, to covering both scenarios.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Um, one of the other, ah, points we were interested in exploring with you is just the – the impact it may or may not have on the broad agricultural sector so the principle of taking a large area of farming land that would be used for another purpose - - -

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MS BREWER: Mmm.

MR HUTTON: - - - um, and the impact that might have on, um, sharing providers of agricultural products, the more broad socio-economic impacts; is there any regard given to that in – in your assessment?

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MS BREWER: Ah, we did consider that in – in our assessment. The, um, the site is currently used for sheep and cattle grazing. Ah, UPC is committed to grazing the areas, ah, within the project site that don't have, um, solar arrays but also grazing within the development footprint so that some of that grazing can continue, um, and that the, um, the consideration is that it's a – a small percentage of that - - -

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, you know, the broader agricultural land available in a – in a – in a much smaller percentage of the available, um, BSAL.

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: Yeah.

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MR HUTTON: And – and considerations of cumulative impacts noting that there are other, um, projects proposed for the region, um, potentially larger?

MR DAVIES: Sir, Iwan Davies. I think, um, it's the first point in our, ah, in our – in the assessment section on our – our assessment report, um, regarding impacts on agricultural land.

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MR HUTTON: Mmm.

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MR DAVIES: - - - um, and that considers the cumulative impacts with other proposed – or approved or proposed, um, State significant developments in the New England region so I think, um, at section 88 we outline that, um, the – the development footprint of the combined, um, approved and operational State significance of all the farms in the New England North West Region would be around 4000 hectares, ah, which represents, um, a very small fraction. I think it's 06 per cent of the 6.7 million hectares of, um, land being used for agriculture, um, in – in the New England Region.

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MR HUTTON: Mmm. Okay. Did, um, either of the other Commissioners have any comments on - - -

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PROF BARLOW: Well, I guess the question for me was it's not only the land; it's the agricultural service – the service industries that serve agriculture - - -

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

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PROF BARLOW: - - - did you give any consideration for that?

MS BREWER: Um, look, I mean I think we – we considered the broad merits of the project in terms of, um, the – that the project will also have, um, other benefits in the region so that it's not – it's not only, ah, I guess, a take of those benefits from agriculture, that it is, um, injecting construction jobs and – and investment in the region. Um, I – I think our assessment, um, considers that that's – it's still a – a small percentage, um, and wouldn't have a significant impact on those – on those other agricultural business.

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MR HUTTON: Mmm. Okay. Um, just a slightly different question now we've moved past that issue, um, often with these developments there's a need for there to be some upgrades of the existing, um, transition infrastructure to accommodate that particular project, um, given the earlier figure, are you aware of any upgrades that are necessary – third party upgrades outside of the project to enable this project to, um, take the off-take energy and put it into the – into the grid; are you - - -

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MS BREWER: Well, so TransGrid was consulted - - -

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, through the process. They didn't raise any issues with the project. They did note, in their submission, that they were working closely with UPC - - -

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - and that TransGrid has progressed a – a connection inquiry – sorry, a connection, um, process agreement with UPC. Um, they're – they have identified that there is capacity in the region, and really, I guess, we consider that that's a, um, you know, it's more of a commercial, um, risk for a requirement - - -

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MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS BREWER: - - - that there's – if – if there isn't, ah, sufficient capacity in a region then they may need to stage the project, um, or, you know, wait for those upgrades so there are, obviously, the upgrades, um, that I mentioned earlier about the Queensland, ah, inter-connector but the project, um, as we understand it, necessarily rely on that but there are upgrades proposed in the region not only to that Queensland inter-connector but also to the other transmission lines in the area.

45

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah, so it's bigger than the project; it's a regional - - -

MS BREWER: It is, yes.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

5 MS BREWER: There is regional focus in that area - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

10 MS BREWER: - - - because it's a key location.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, thank you. Um, the next question I have is just around the, ah, I guess, construction and the impact that will have on the – or otherwise – on the communities with respect to, um, accommodation principally, and I note that, um, the department has put forward a condition that requires an accommodation
15 management plan.

I'm just keen to hear a bit about, um, your – not necessarily what we'll talk to the applicant about some of the detail of that plan – but your thinking around what the plan will do, and how that will provide, um, some reassurances against some of the
20 potential impacts related to this – this potential influx – keeping in mind also that we understand that, um, other projects, there may be an overlap of construction, um, timing which will – we've just got to give regard to that as well – so we're keen to get some feedback on that issue.

25 MS BREWER: Yeah, so we did look, ah, look at that in detail, and so as you would be aware the, ah, project did originally propose - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

30 MS BREWER: - - - um, accommodation on the site - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

35 MS BREWER: - - - and then, um, and – and that has since been removed. Um, the consideration was that that, um, it – that it was better to place those benefits into the – to the region - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

40 MS BREWER: - - - and that there were, um, opportunities in the larger regional centres, particularly with Armidale quite close - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

45 MS BREWER: - - - but also in Tamworth.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: So the – in terms of the cumulative impact the, um, the other projects – solar projects in the region, um, Metz Solar is approved and has already commenced construction - - -

5 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, and the others are - - -

10 PROF BARLOW: That's – that's at Hillgrove, isn't it, I'm assuming, yes?

MS BREWER: So that - - -

PROF BARLOW: That's to the east, yes.

15 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: The east, that's right, east of Armidale so the others are – are all in the assessment process - - -

20 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - and, um, sort of – at this stage we don't consider that that – that there would be a significant overlap in construction with the ones approved, and the later ones would then need to consider the cumulative impact of the ones approved.

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah, okay. So the – the approved ones are – are away and then there's others - - -

MS BREWER: Ah, some distance.

30 MR HUTTON: - - - presumably to come online, yeah?

MS BREWER: Yeah.

35 MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS BREWER: And that that accommodation strategy could then be developed in consultation with Council, and if it's identified that they're – for whatever reason - - -

40 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - and we don't – we don't think that, um, necessarily that that is going to be the case but if for whatever reason other accommodation is required that they would, you know, seek approval through Council or through, you know, a modification to the – to the project.

45

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: But I think the first principle was really to, um, to – to ensure that that, you know, the benefit was more in the region, and that they did get the benefit
5 of – of the accommodation.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

PROF BARLOW: It's important to note also that the – the strategy requires the
10 applicant to consider the cumulative impacts with other State significant developments in the region, ah, and that will also apply, um, if the, um, if those projects are approved, that would also apply to those projects.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

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PROF BARLOW: So each project has to undertake that – that assessment.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, so would each project have their own strategy or – or is the thinking that you would develop a regional strategy that they're all stakeholders too;
20 how do you see that?

MS BREWER: The thinking is more that it would be a project specific, um, strategy - - -

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - but it's in consultation with Council - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

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MS BREWER: - - - so that gives it the regional focus - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

35 PROF BARLOW: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - um, and that each one considers the cumulative impact, and that at the point when they're aware of – of, you know, whether there might be a, um, an overlap of construction that that can be considered in detail if we don't
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PROF BARLOW: Is – is there any provisions for the – clearly there will be a different Council, um, and some in Uralla and some in Armidale, um, is there any need for the Councils to consult about coordination of that?

45 MS BREWER: Ah, look, I mean we – we've asked that they consider the other – the other, um, State significant projects that, you know, may be in the region, may be in other – other Council areas.

PROF BARLOW: Just so I can get from Andrew um, if they were all approved, ah, what is the aggregate capacity of all those solar farms?

5 MS BREWER: I think what we've seen over the last little while has been, ah, an influx of solar projects that have been approved, and I think we recognise that not all of those may go head - - -

PROF BARLOW: Okay.

10 MS BREWER: - - - um, so the, ah, in terms of – are you talking in terms of capacity to the transmission network or - - -

PROF BARLOW: Just generation capacity.

15 MR DAVIES: I – I can come back to that if you give me five minutes.

PROF BARLOW: Yes, okay. Just as a - - -

20 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: I think each project, as we get to them, you know, we will look at that for the other projects as we get their assessments, um, but the – we understand that New England is quite progressed in terms of that, you know, their connection with TransGrid - - -

25 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - um, and Metz has commenced construction so it's really – it's really a risk for the – for the developer - - -

30 PROF BARLOW: The proponent, yes.

MS BREWER: - - - that there is - - -

35 PROF BARLOW: Just in a developmental context I just thought it would be interesting to know what the aggregate proposed at this point

MS BREWER: Oh, in terms of the total - - -

40 PROF BARLOW: The total - - -

MR HUTTON: Megawatts?

45 PROF BARLOW: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - megawatts

PROF BARLOW: I think Iwan is doing it.

MR DAVIES: Yeah.

5 MS BREWER: Um, so actually, yeah, um, but I think – as I said, I think that’s the – the risk for – for the developer and - - -

PROF BARLOW: Yes.

10 MS BREWER: - - - and they may stage their – their development or it might mean that – that other projects are maybe delayed, and – and the maybe not be, um, be developed. The area has been identified in the Renewable Energy Zone as well.

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah, and – and I think we need to acknowledge the – the spokes of infrastructure, I guess, as an attractive location.

MS BREWER: Exactly. Exactly.

PROF BARLOW: Yeah.

20

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

PROF BARLOW: A confluence that is good.

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Um, one of the other questions we were keen to talk about was just the – the need for water. Obviously, um, the region is in, um, some drought at the moment, and, um, we read that there was at least, ah, 220 megalitres, I think, needed for construction - - -

30 MS BREWER: Yeah.

35 MR HUTTON: - - - um, which is a reasonable amount of water, um, in a rural setting; um, I’m just keen to have your feedback thoughts on the water availability for construction, and then I guess leading – leading that into operations which we acknowledge would be much, much less but, um, yeah, just that I’m keen to get some feedback?

40 MS BREWER: Ah, so yes, there will obviously be water required for construction but that’s predominantly for the purposes of, um, dust suppression so - - -

MR HUTTON: Right.

45 MS BREWER: - - - UPC has proposed that that water source will be from, um, onsite dams or it will be trucked in, and we recognise that the area is in, um, is in a drought but the – we consider that the – the conditions, in terms of requiring them to minimise the dust impact, ah, as well as if they don’t have access to water that – that they would then stage the project so I think there - - -

MR HUTTON: Right.

MS BREWER: - - - are other ways that they could, um, look at – at addressing if –
if water did become an issue so I – I would – the department considers that – that that
5 isn't, um, a significant amount of water, and it's over a short period - - -

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - and that it's much, much less during, ah, operation.
10

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: But should that become an issue, um, they would be able to, ah,
truck it in, and that's been accounted for but if not they can look at, ah, different - - -
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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - construction practices - - -

MR HUTTON: Okay.
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MS BREWER: - - - and – and minimise the areas that are open, um, and – and also,
ah, other methods of, um, dust suppression.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.
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MS BREWER: So we – we don't consider that a constraint - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.
30

MS BREWER: - - - but it' up to the – the proponent to just stage the development.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, and we'll take – take that up with them, um, a bit later on
today, yeah
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MS BREWER: Sure.

MR HUTTON: Um - - -

MR DAVIES: Sorry, to – to answer your questions now - - -
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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR DAVIES: - - - so, um, these are very indicative capacities, um, given that some
of the projects in the area are at the, um, at the scoping stage, um, with no EIS yet
45 submitted.

PROF BARLOW: Mmm.

MR DAVIES: Um, but approximately, from – from the five projects, that’s, um,
5 this project, New England, the Metz Solar Project, Salisbury, um, Tilbuster and Oxley
there’s around 1.8 gigawatts there of capacity.

PROF BARLOW: Mmm. Okay.

10 MS BREWER: Of generation.

MR DAVIES: Um, of – of generation - - -

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

15 MR DAVIES: - - - capacity, yeah.

PROF BARLOW: Thank you, Iwan, yeah.

MR HUTTON: Great. Um, probably one other question I have is just around
20 access transport, um, to the site, um, road networks, um, the need for road upgrades,
um, some of the, um, expectation of other stakeholders like the Uralla Shire Council,
and those things, and then that leads also to then, I think, part of the – the solution
which may appear to be the rail loading facility. Um, I’m just interested to get – get
25 some feedback on your thoughts around how you’ve come up with what access
routes need to be upgraded, what don’t need to be upgraded and those sort of things
as - - -

MS BREWER: Mmm. So I think UBC considered this in detail in terms of having
30 a number of access routes, um, to the site proposed initially, and has then reduced the
access route to, um, off the New England Highway, um, through Barleyfields Road
and Big Ridge Road - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

35 MS BREWER: - - - so they’ve looked at minimising the impact on local roads
through refining that transport route but I’ve also considered that it does have access
to the – to the rail line, and that could also be a way to further reduce the – the traffic
impacts of the project. Um, the road upgrades were considered in detailed
consultation with Council - - -

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MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - so with UPC directly consulting with Council, and through, ah,
45 the department consulting with Council so the – the road upgrades, um, are shown.
Um, UBC considered them, I guess, um, in five segments so there are agreed
upgrades proposed to, ah, so the intersections – so with Barleyfields Road and the
Highway as well as with Barleyfields Road and Big Ridge Road.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: Um, those five sections were considered, and the first part of the –
the access, um, was – was generally agreed so in particular segment 1 and segment 3,
5 ah, the road upgrades were agreed, and – and in general that's, you know, ah, sealing
the road.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

10 MS BREWER: Um, section 2, a short section in – sorry, a section in the middle,
um, is – is considered that it's, ah, that it's generally in accordance with – with those
requirements – that it's already 7.1 metres as opposed to 7.2 - - -

MR HUTTON: Right.

15

MS BREWER: - - - so no further upgrades are proposed to that section because it's
fairly, you know, fairly close , um, what was, ah, considered required by Council.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

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MS BREWER: It's the last section, I guess, where we had more detailed, ah,
conversations with Council, um, so section 4 is, ah, an unformed farm track, it's
adjacent to the boundary, and section 5, ah, is a, um, a paper road that would be
located within the site. So Council requested that that last section, 4 and 5, be also
25 upgraded, um, to include sealing. Now, this, um, this section of the road would
really only provide, ah, access to the site, and access for hosts so, um, the department
considered that it was unnecessary, um, that – for it to be upgraded to, um, to include
sealing, and UBC proposed, ah, a gravel road, um, and also committed that if the –
the gravel road is accepted as the standard that they would maintain that for the life
30 of the project.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: So our consideration was really that it's a – it's a no through road
35 that only provides, ah, access for the site; it essentially functions like a hall road,
um, for the project.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: The main traffic – increase in traffic is, you know, for a shorter
40 period during construction, um, and that those impacts could be effectively managed
through a traffic management plan.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

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PROF LIPMAN: Um, can I just ask a question? Um, would a sealed road, ah,
create less dust?

MS BREWER: Look, I mean I think there are, um, there are fewer residences, um, closer to that end of the – the road.

PROF LIPMAN: Mmm.

5

MS BREWER: I think there are other ways also to manage dust, ah, through roads, and we're aware of, um, you know, sprays and that sort of thing that can be, um, that can be used as well as water for dust suppression. Um, I think that – I think the consideration of sealing a road for the sole purpose of dust mitigation wasn't

10 considered necessary because there were other mechanisms for managing dust.

PROF LIPMAN: But, um, given the scarcity of water at the current time, surely it would be a better option?

15 MS BREWER: I think we considered that – that it wasn't necessary given the – the, um, the additional upgrade that would be required to get it from a gravel road to a sealed road.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

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PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

MR DAVIES: I – I think – I think it's also worth noting that, um, not a – that a lot of solar farms will be accessed via, um, unsealed roads.

25

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MR DAVIES: Um, this – the majority of this access route would be sealed; it's only the last section that's, um, perhaps two – two kilometres or so, um,

30 that would be a, um, an unsealed gravel road - - -

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MR DAVIES: - - - um, and there are, um, as – as Nicole mentioned, there are dust suppressants, um, that can be used along with water.

35

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

PROF LIPMAN: All right. Thank you.

40

MS BREWER: But it's that last section from the project boundary really into the boundary – into the sites so it is - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

45

MS BREWER: - - - it isn't - - -

MR HUTTON: Which is the purple section - - -

MS BREWER: Yes.

5 MR HUTTON: - - - on figure 3.2 out of the - - -

MS BREWER: And the blue section.

MR DAVIES: Correct.

10 MR HUTTON: - - - blue section, yeah?

MS BREWER: Um, so it – it – it acts as a – similar to a hall road within a project site rather than a public road.

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

PROF LIPMAN: All right. Thank you.

20 PROF BARLOW: Did – did the proponent make a, ah, a point in this, I would have thought, that, you know, if you have all those solar panels it's in your interests to have a minimum amount of dust because the efficiency of the solar panels, um, so did they make any point about that?

25 MS BREWER: Well, I think at the point when the solar panels are operating - - -

PROF BARLOW: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - the traffic is going to be far less.

30 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

PROF BARLOW: Okay.

35 MS BREWER: So I'm not sure that that would be necessarily an impact that would need to be considered, and they haven't identified it, ah, as an issue.

PROF BARLOW: Mmm.

40 MR HUTTON: Okay. Just related but, um, I guess, also related to broader issues around the project is the – the difference between the project related and non-project related receptors or residences; how – how are they – how have they been defined, is that simply an ownership, um, mechanism to declare a property a non – a non-project – what's the terminology again – a non-project related versus project related

45 sensitive receiver or receptor?

MS BREWER: So those receivers that I identified on the figure are the residences of the hosts - - -

MR HUTTON: Right.

5

MS BREWER: - - - so that are – that are hosting the infrastructure.

MR HUTTON: So they are the – they’re the project related ones?

10 MS BREWER: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Yes, okay. And so the non-project related then are residences of – of folks that live outside of the host property - - -

15 MS BREWER: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: - - - but adjacent to – yeah?

MS BREWER: That’s correct.

20

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS BREWER: Yeah.

25 MR HUTTON: Is the, um, is it an accumulation of a number of host properties to make up the project area or is it one single property owner?

MR DAVIES: Um, I’m – I’m unsure exactly how many land owners there are.

30 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR DAVIES: Ah, my understanding is that there are more than one - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

35

MR DAVIES: - - - but I think that the applicant

MR HUTTON: Yeah. We’ll direct the question to them on that one, yeah.

40 MR DAVIES: Yeah.

PROF BARLOW: Have they purchased the land or is it leased?

45 MS BREWER: My understanding is that they would be, um, hosting the infrastructure so it would – but it’s a lease arrangement.

PROF BARLOW: Okay.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

5 MS BREWER: But that's probably worth confirming with

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

PROF BARLOW: Okay. Thank you.

10

MR HUTTON: And I guess that leads to another question in my mind around the responsibility for the decommissioning, say, for example, if, um, in 20 years the – a new technology comes out, and solar panels are no longer the current line of thinking – the responsibility for decommissioning, um, which need to be – understand that in – in terms of whether it sits with the host property owners or sits with the developer, um, and whether you've had any thoughts around – around that given the scale and the size of this, um, operation, um, you know, it's really an – an equal construction, if you like, what the – the effort to put into construction effectively would – would be the effort to decommission in my mind – so have you had any thoughts about that in the decommissioning process or responsibilities for, um, that liability?

15
20

MS BREWER: Um, in a broad sense we'd consider that it's the responsibility of – of the applicant - - -

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - and that that should be something that's covered in the agreement between the host and the applicant so, um, you may want to check that with - - -

30

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - the nature of that agreement with the people concerned.

35 MR HUTTON: But that wouldn't be something you'd see at the department level or any agreements?

MS BREWER: No.

40 MR HUTTON: No.

MS BREWER: But we recognise that the – the approval obviously follows the land, and so there is a scenario where the land owner, who is essentially associated with the project because they are receiving money for the – for hosting the infrastructure

45
- - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - that there is a scenario where – where they may – maybe responsible because the, um, the land – the approval goes with the land.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

5

MS BREWER: But, um, we consider that the, ah, the conditions around the outcomes that are required for decommissioning and , um, would address that so we are - - -

10 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - the department has, um, assessed the New England Project in accordance with, um, with the others that the department has assessed - - -

15 MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - and we were also, um, I guess, ah, sought – that the Commission sought advice when we were, um, discussing the Orange Grove, um, Solar Project, and so we provided that advice to you, and we have copies of that if you – if you want to have a look at that.

20

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MS BREWER: But it's obviously available on your website as well, and so we – that's our position and we've - - -

25

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, we've assessed this project in accordance with that position as well.

30

MR HUTTON: Using the same – yep, that's fine. Thank you. Um, one of the things we've noted, I guess, early is just the, um, the landscape – the commitment to landscape landscaping across the – the region to deal with, um, visual impact mitigation. It hasn't, in our initial reading anyway, it hasn't come through as a – as a real core strategy to minimising visual impact. Um, I'm just keen to understand whether the department is, um, has an expectation around visual screening as a – as an option. I mean there's obviously topography and orientation of projects and setbacks and things that come into play, but, um, visual screening, particularly in a rural environment, is a pretty useful, um, visual mitigant.

35

40

MS BREWER: We did consider that in detail. Um, we considered that the, ah, the location of the residences, and the distance from the majority of the residences and the topography of the region - - -

45

MR HUTTON: Yeah

MS BREWER: - - - provided a lot of that screening - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

5 MS BREWER: - - - and that we've – we've assessed, um, the impacts to those residences and to the, um, in a particular residence, um, that is the closest to the project - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

10

MS BREWER: - - - and we consider that the amendments to the project, and the setbacks that, ah, UPC has proposed from the boundary, that, um, that the majority of residences are more than a kilometre - - -

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - and that landscaping, um, wasn't considered necessary.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. I mean we'll benefit enormously from the opportunity to get
20 on the ground, um, so we're looking at plans at the moment so um - - -

MR DAVIES: But I – I think it's fair to say also that, um, that the applicant has actually done a – a very good job in avoiding impacts on residences.

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR DAVIES: Um, I'm involved in every solar application in the State, um, State significant, and I – I am yet to see an applicant that has considered potential visual impacts, and mitigated those impacts through design of the project - - -

30

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR DAVIES: - - - rather than relying on, um, landscape screening.

35 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

MR DAVIES: So you have a number of different setbacks, um, from, um, from various residences but particularly in that North Eastern corner.

40 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: And I think that the principle in assessment is always to – to avoid in the first instance - - -

45 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, before you consider mitigation so the department feels that that avoidance in their design of the project have led to – to good outcomes.

5 PROF LIPMAN: Would you see any benefit in relation to the powers – I think it's NP1 – within one kilometre, and including some, um, vegetation screening trees or anything like that to - - -

MS BREWER: We did consider the impact on N1, ah, in – in some detail.

10 PROF LIPMAN: Yes.

MS BREWER: Um, so the – at the closest point, N1, is 450 metres from, ah, the solar array but that's to the south. The department's considered the primary view from the house, and you'll see on the site visit that the – the living areas, um, and the
15 primary view from the site is directed to the north and the north west.

MR HUTTON: Right.

MS BREWER: And so the – the potential for impact is really to that – that north
20 and north west, and, ah, you can see from the, um, from the photo montage in the assessment report, and – and in the EIS that – that at – at one kilometre we don't consider that that's a significant impact. The land is undulating, and, um, there's a – a very small sliver that, um, we don't consider is – is a significant impact.

25 MR HUTTON: Um, the last couple of points for me, um, just in respect to the operating hours the application has requested – the applicant, sorry, has requested additional powers with the, I guess, the thinking that, um, more opportunity to work means quicker construction, and, um, I – I note that the department has defaulted
30 back to the standard which – which I have noted - - -

MS BREWER: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: - - - any comments on that – on the applicant's request? Obviously,
35 your thinking is pretty clear, yes?

MS BREWER: Yeah. Look, it's – it's really we've – we've defaulted to the – the, um, construction hours - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

40

MS BREWER: - - - that are outlined in the, um, interim construction guideline.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Was – was the applicant's argument that they could – they
45 could, um, maintain an appropriate original noise level outside of those hours or that it wasn't more about being given the opportunity to, um, exceed noise criteria, um, before designated hours?

MS BREWER: My understanding is that their – their drive was – was really around speeding up - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

5

MS BREWER: - - - the, um, the – the construction process - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

10 MS BREWER: - - - for those additional hours allowing to construct

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I – I certainly note the department's position; it's quite clear. I – we'll pick up that, I guess, with the applicant again later, um, and talk a bit more about the rationale behind that. Um, it's probably the bulk of my
15 issues or concerns or questions. Um, oh, just the subdivision aspect, yes, the aspect around subdividing off the, um, I assume it's the substation infrastructure, and my understanding is that's to allow that, um, land tenure to go with the infrastructure, the broader regional infrastructure. Um, it's the subdivision size is less than the, um, permissible size based on the Uralla Council LEP, um, but because it's included as
20 part of the SSD application, um, it's – it's able to be assessed, um, and appropriate in that regard?

MS BREWER: That's correct.

25 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS BREWER: So it is for the purposes of the TransGrid substation - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

30

MS BREWER: - - - and it will then allow them to provide that infrastructure back to TransGrid to – to operate that substation, um, so it is really for the purposes of operation and you're right that it is, um, ah, it – it is a permissible under the LEP but it does, um, we don't consider that it has, um, it has a significant impact because it's,
35 um, central to the operation of the – of the solar farm, and Council didn't object to
- - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

40 MS BREWER: - - - to providing that.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. So to be clear it's essential to the operation of the solar farm but the operation of the substation will immediately transfer back to the TransGrid or the – the – yeah, okay.

45

MS BREWER: To TransGrid, yes.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, and that becomes part of their asset group?

MS BREWER: Yes.

5 MR HUTTON: Okay. I understand.

MS BREWER: So that that subdivision facilitates that transfer of

10 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah, because presumably there's a range of access issues, and safety and a whole range of things that - - -

MS BREWER: That's correct.

15 MR HUTTON: - - - that the standard set by TransGrid?

MS BREWER: Yeah.

20 MR HUTTON: Okay. Um, I think that's probably the bulk of my questions. Snow, do you have any other questions in your mind?

25 PROF BARLOW: I have one. Um, we passed through it quite early but it's how rather in the context of, um, they were going to continue to use the site in a limited way for agriculture, basically grazing around the perimeter, and I think you said some grazing around the solar panels; was there any more detail? My – my concern here is – is really in the – it's around biodiversity but it's not so much on the remnant stuff but it's actually the control of weeds and feral animals, ah, in – this is a big area of land, and it sits in agricultural land – ah, and it's if the ferals, say, are not controlled, um, in accordance with what their surrounding becomes a reservoir of infection for the whole district so, ah, what are their plans to manage underneath
30 these panels?

35 MS BREWER: Sir, I – they have proposed to – to graze underneath the panels, and they will need to re-establish ground cover but we have proposed conditions to manage the weed, um, weeds and, um, pests - - -

PROF BARLOW: Yeah.

40 MS BREWER: - - - within the site so we do recognise that that is an issue, um, for a development such as this, and have provided conditions around, um, around limiting and minimising having weed control, um, and pest control for the site.

45 PROF BARLOW: Mmm. Are those conditions sort of, you know, was it a condition that they control the weeds and pests to the district standard or something like that, you know, so that it is consistent with the agricultural activities around?

MS BREWER: Um, our condition talks to – to minimising that the spread of - - -

PROF BARLOW: Yeah.

MS BREWER: - - - um, you know, weed and pests from the site.

5 PROF BARLOW: Mmm.

MR HUTTON: I – I assume, as a landholder the expectations for a landholder apply but again, we can ask that question of the applicant.

10 PROF BARLOW: I think we need to ask that question of the applicant, yeah.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Snow, did you have – sorry, Snow, any other

PROF BARLOW: No, that’s fine for me, thank you.

15

PROF LIPMAN: Um, just maybe something on the biodiversity aspects, the offsets and, ah, you know, I – I see the ECD are satisfied with what has been provided but perhaps if you could elaborate a little bit on the – that aspect?

20 MS BREWER: Yes. So the, um, the design of the project, um, has looked at, um, minimising the – the impact on native vegetation, um, the recommended conditions so that if, um, adopted the first principle is avoidance. Um, the recommended conditions also include, um, credits for, um, divided SB offsets that, um, that would need to be discharged, um, for the project.

25

PROF BARLOW: What is the timeframe of the discharge of those credits; do they have to acquire those credits immediately before - - -

30 MR HUTTON: Yeah, there is a – there is a condition, a draft condition that says - - -

MS BREWER: Yes, prior - - -

35 MR HUTTON: - - - “Prior to operation” I think, is it, or - - -

MR DAVIES: Prior – prior to commencement - - -

MS BREWER: Prior to commencement of the development.

40 MR HUTTON: - - - development, yeah, condition 9.

PROF BARLOW: Okay. Good.

45 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

PROF BARLOW: Good.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

PROF LIPMAN: And I also notice that there are quite a lot of, um, Aboriginal and Heritage sites in the area, and there are provisions and conditions for those; um, is
5 there any concern about disturbance of – of these aspects? Will it – will it have – will the development have any great impact on those that you can think of?

MS BREWER: Um, the UPC assessed those, um, in detail - - -

10 PROF LIPMAN: Mmm.

MS BREWER: - - - um, in their Heritage Assessment - - -

PROF LIPMAN: Yes.
15

MS BREWER: - - - that was done in consultation with, um, Aboriginal stakeholders, and has proposed, um, you know, mitigation measures where those impacts couldn't be avoided, and avoidance where it – where it could be so, um, no, I think the – I think the assessment has considered that in detail.
20

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: All right. Well, I think – I think, um, yeah, thank you for your time.

25 PROF BARLOW: That's, ah, fine for me, thank you.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, thank you. We appreciate your, um, feedback on those questions. Um, obviously, we get the opportunity to meet with the applicant later so we'll, um, talk to them about similar issues, and others as well so other than that I
30 think we might, um, close the meeting, and thank you for your attendance. Thank you.

MS BREWER: Thank you.

35 PROF BARLOW: Thank you.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

40 **MEETING CONCLUDED**

[10.16 am]