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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

TRANSCRIPT IN CONFIDENCE

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INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION

PUBLIC MEETING

RE: WALLA WALLA SOLAR FARM PROJECT

**COMMISSION: ANDREW HUTTON (CHAIR)
 ZADA LIPMAN**

LOCATION: ELECTRONIC PUBLIC MEETING

DATE: 9.59 AM, THURSDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2020

THIS PROCEEDING WAS CONDUCTED BY VIDEO CONFERENCE

MR A. HUTTON: Good morning, and welcome to the Independent Planning
5 Commission's electronic public meeting on the state significant development
application for the Walla Walla Solar Farm. My name is Andrew Hutton and I am
the chair of this IPC panel. Joining to me to my left is fellow commissioner,
Professor Zada Lipman. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the
10 traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to the
elders, past, present and emerging. FRV Services Australia Pty Ltd proposed to
develop a 300 megawatt solar farm approximately five kilometres north east of the
Walla Walla in – region in the Riverina region of New South Wales. Commissioners
make an annual declaration of interests identifying potential conflicts with their
15 appointed role, and, for the record, no conflicts of interest have been identified in
relation to our determination of this development application. You can find
additional information on the way we manage potential conflicts on our Commission
website.

In line with the regulations introduced in response to the ongoing COVID-19
20 pandemic, the Commission has moved this public hearing online with registered
speakers provided the opportunity to present to the panel by either telephone or video
conference. In the interests of openness and transparency, we're streaming this
public hearing live on our website. As always, a full transcript of these proceedings
will be made available on our website in the next few days. A little bit about the
25 Commission and its role in this determination. The Independent Planning
Commission was established by the New South Wales government on 1 March 2018
as an independent statutory body operating separately to the Department of Planning
Industry and Environment and other agencies. The Commission plays a very
important role in strengthening transparency and independence in the decision-
30 making processes for major development and land use planning issues in New South
Wales.

The key functions of the Commission include determining state significant
development applications, conducting public hearings for development applications
35 and other matters, and also providing independent advice on any other planning and
development matter where requested by the Minister of Planning secretary. The
Commission is the consent authority for state significant development applications in
circumstances where there have been more than 50 public objections, objections
made by the local councils or reportable political donations by the applicant. The
40 Commission was – is not involved in the department's assessment of the project or
the preparation of the assessment report itself. So where are we in the process?
Well, this is a public meeting that forms one part of the Commission process. We
have also had the opportunity to meet with the department and also with the
applicant and with Greater Hume Council.
45

Transcripts of all of these meetings are published on the Commission's website and, in addition, we have had also the opportunity to visit the site on 29 October to have a look at the site and understand the layout. After today's meeting, we may convene with relevant stakeholders if clarification or additional information is required on any matters that are raised in today's presentations. So the next steps. Following today's meeting, we will endeavour to determine the development application as soon as possible, but we do note that there may be a delay if we find additional information is needed, and we need to have discussions with other stakeholders. Meeting purpose. The meeting provides us with an opportunity to hear your views on the proposed solar farm. The department's final assessment report and the recommended conditions of consent.

It is important to note that the Commission has available to it all the submissions that have been made to the department during the exhibition of the environmental impact statement. As such, members of the public are encourage to avoid repeating or restating those submissions that you've already made on the application. The Commission also notes that there are factors that, by law, it is not permitted to take into account in making determination and submissions on such topics cannot be – and such topics cannot be taken into consideration. These factors include the reputation of the applicant and any past planning law breaches by the applicant. A little bit about how today's meeting will run. So before I get into the presentation, I would just like to go over how the meeting will be undertaken today.

First of all, we will hear from the department's officers who will present the findings of their whole of government application. Secondly, we will hear from the applicant and the consultants involved about the application itself. After that, we will move on to the registered speakers. All speakers have been advised of their speaking times ahead of the meeting. It is important that everyone registered to speak gets a fair share of their time, and so, as such, we will be monitoring time throughout the day. I will be enforcing timekeeping rules as the chair, and I do reserve the right to allow additional time if needed, or if there's new material needs to be presented. If you have a copy of your speaking notes or any other additional material to support your presentation, we would really appreciate it if you could provide a copy through to the Commission.

Just a reminder that we will accept written submissions on the Walla Walla Solar Farm up until 5.00 pm next Tuesday 12 November. You can make a submission via email or post or by using the Have Your Say portal on the Commission's website. Please do note any information given to us will be made public, and the Commission's privacy statement governs our approach to your information. Our privacy statement is also available on our website. Okay, thank you. I would just like now to call for our first speaker which is Mike Young, Nicole Brewer and Rob Beckett from the Department of Planning Industry and Environment, and they have 30 minutes allotted.

MR M. YOUNG: Thank you, Commissioners. My name is Mike Young. I'm the executive director involved in the assessment of major energy projects around New

South Wales. I'm supported today by my director, Nicole Brewer, and also Rob Beckett, an assessment officer in the energy assessments team from the Department of Planning Industry and Environment. I've prepared a short presentation to summarise the department's assessment of the Walla Walla solar project today. So I think there's the first slide. If we can move to the next slide, please. So, as the Commission has outlined, this is a state significant development project being assessed under the Environmental Planning Assessment Act which is the planning legislation under which all developments are assessed in New South Wales, be they state significant, local or regional.

We have taken a comprehensive whole of government assessment report of the application. Whole of government in that we have included and consulted with key agencies in preparing our assessment including Greater Hume Council as well. As indicated, the Independent Planning Commission is the determining authority or the consent authority for the application in this case because of two reasons. One is that there was more than 50 objections to the application, and, secondly, the Greater Hume Shire Council has objected to the project. As indicated in the introduction, we are at the final stage of the process. I think it's important to recognise that there have been some significant steps to this point over probably a couple of years now including formal and informal opportunities for the community and other stakeholders to provide input into the process, and as indicated in that flowchart at the bottom of the page, we are at the final determination stage and the final public meeting where the final decision will be made on the merits of the application.

Next slide, please. So, in terms of the project, I don't propose to go through it in exhaustive detail, but there's a map there that indicates the location of the Walla Walla Solar Farm in yellow on Benambra Road off the Olympic Highway. For the benefit of context and in regard to cumulative impacts, you will also see a number of other proposed solar farms nearby being the Culcairn, Jindera and Glenellen solar farms, none of which have been approved at this stage but they are proposed. As indicated, FRV is the proponent. We're talking about a 300 megawatt solar farm which is a large scale solar farm. There are certainly larger ones been proposed and approved and built in New South Wales, but it's certainly of a significant scale. 700,000 panels. The panels are four metres high, to get an idea of scale.

There is a transmission line that essentially goes through the corner or adjacent to the site, and there will be a substation built there that would then connect the power generated by the solar farm into the electricity grid. The company has asked for a 30 year project life or consent life, however, as technology changes and materials or infrastructure made need to be refurbished or replaced, the proposed conditions do allow that time to be extended not in terms of aerial extent or size, but in terms of refurbishing or upgrading infrastructure that may need that to be undertaken over time. It's – the disturbance footprint within that yellow areas 421 hectares. So it is a large scale project. Investment is also large. Almost \$400 million. The company, FRV, has also offered to pay community contributions to Greater Hume Council in the order of \$2.2 million over the life of the project.

The project, of course, would generate a range of employment opportunities, particularly during construction. Less so during operations, but during construction the estimates are that it would generate around 250 construction jobs, and I think in the order of 20 or 21 jobs during operations. And the access, fairly clearly, and you can see that from the map, is off the Olympic Highway to Benambra Road to the access point. The single or the key access point to the site which is on the north west corner closest to the Olympic Highway. Next slide, please. So, as indicated, we've undertaken a range of formal and informal community engagement over the assessment period. We've formally publicly exhibited the EIS and received 150 submissions on the project which is a relatively large number for a solar project. Typically, we do get substantially less community submissions on solar projects around New South Wales.

That being said, other nearby projects such as Jindera and so forth and Culcairn have also attracted significant interest from the community. However, I think it's important to say that whilst the majority of submissions did object to the project, there are also – we did also receive a significant minority of submissions that supported the project, principally for renewable energy benefits and economic benefits, and I will talk about the reasons for objection and those issues in a minute. As indicated, we have consulted closely with a range of government agencies. There's a list of them there including agriculture, transport biodiversity, water, fire and the EPA. The Environment Protection Authority. None of those agencies have raised any objections and the recommendations or comments made by those agencies we have sought to address in the assessment process or reflect in the recommended conditions of consent.

Clearly, the Greater Hume Shire Council has objected to this project, and, indeed, the other solar projects proposed in its LGA, and my understanding is that, while the assessment and the changes to the project we will talk about in a minute, have addressed some of those concerns, it maintains its formal objection to the project. And, in addition to that formal exhibition process, the department held a public meeting and, undertake – undertook a site visit in November last year. That public meeting was well attended in Jindera, and we also have taken the opportunity to meet individually – not just looking at the site but also individually with landowners who are living in proximity to the site as well. So we wanted to make sure that we've seen the site and the layout and the potential impacts for ourselves, not just relying on the documentation.

Next slide, please. So some of the key issues raised in submissions through the process are things like visual impacts both on local residences and the landscape as a whole, including, in particular, for the Walla Walla project, the Orange Grove Gardens Function Centre which is located to the south east of the proposed layout, and we will talk about that in more detail. Certainly concerns about impacts on agricultural land and amenity impacts on local residents like noise and dust. Concerns about traffic and impacts on the local road network. Biodiversity impacts associated with the clearing on the site. And, importantly, also given the other projects proposed by not approved in the locality, are concerns about cumulative

impacts on all of those matters including particularly on agricultural land and loss of productive land within the region.

5 Next slide, please. So on visual impacts, whilst there are a number of residents in the locality, there are really four dwellings in close proximity to the project, within about two kilometres of the project. Some closer, some further away. Through the process, and given the concerns raised by those local residents, the company has made a number of changes to the project, and we, as a department in our assessment, have imposed a range of conditions reflecting those changes to minimise or reduce those impacts of the project as first proposed in the EIS and in the exhibited documentation that people would have seen. The response to submission and those amendments to the project have been also uploaded to the department's website so that people can have the benefit of seeing what those changes involve.

15 I think the key – the highlights of the changes through the process that have been made include a significant increase to the setback of the infrastructure from Orange Grove Gardens, in particular. Now, the proposed setback is 1.8 kilometres, and there is a map I will show – present to the Commission shortly that will show how that has changed. There's also increased setback of – to residents at R1. R1a and R1b. My understanding is that setback now is in the order of 210 metres. There's also an increased setback from another key residence to the north west of the project, R2, where the substation, in particular, was concern to that – the landowners there, and that has now been further set back by another 100 metres to approximately 900 metres from the dwelling. There's also a range of increased vegetation screening around the site. In particular, the screening has been substantially increased in proximity to some of those key receivers to increase that – the depth of vegetation buffer to around about 50 metres, ie, a very thick vegetation screen as it is developed over time.

30 And also it's important to say that there is existing vegetation on the site. While some of it will be proposed to be cleared, there are – there is a significant proportion of the vegetation that will be retained which will also help address and mitigate potential visual impacts. Next slide, please. So here we can see a layout of the project. I guess I would just like to draw your attention to particularly the south east corner where you can see that arc of dark green. That is the proposed vegetation buffer, and that area to the south east of the site is now – will remain in agricultural production, and also provides a significant setback to Orange Grove Gardens which is located further to the south east in that corner of the site. There's also enhanced vegetation buffers to the north. The dark green there are receivers are R1a and R1b, and there's also enhanced vegetation buffers on the north west corner adjacent to the proposed substation which is in dark purple square there, and that is to mitigate impacts – visual impacts on R2 which is further to the north west of the project.

45 There's also a range of – I won't go into too much detail there but you can see that other site constraints, such as the creek that runs through the site, Aboriginal heritage sites and remnant vegetation, have been avoided where possible in the design of the project and certainly we would be supporting those elements in our conditions. Next

slide, please. So this is an example of the view from the veranda, I think, from the function centre which we've – the department has visited. Looking, I guess, north or north west towards the site, you can see there that the red is designed to indicate the previous location of the potential solar panels from the function centre. That, as a result of the changes that have been proposed and would be conditioned in our recommended conditions, that red line or that red area would be pushed back a further one kilometre I think.

So there's a significant improvement in that potential view. In addition, there would also be significant vegetation buffers planted in between the function centre and the proposed infrastructure to further mitigate potential impacts. Next slide, please. In regard to agricultural capability, look, the department certainly understands the concerns of council and local residents and, indeed, local members of parliament about the cumulative impacts of solar on prime agricultural land, and we certainly recognise that that is an issue that needs to be balanced in decision-making both for this project and more broadly as further renewable projects are developed in New South Wales, but, for this site, in particular, the site at the moment is used primarily for grazing with some cropping.

Whilst it is good quality agricultural land, and I know there's some concerns about the mapping and the status of this. I'm happy to answer questions on that. But, at the moment, under the existing capability mapping in New South Wales, the vast majority of the site is class 4 land with a small area of class 6. So, whilst it is good quality agricultural land, absolutely, it's not class 1, class 2 or class 3 according to the mapping. That's not to say that it's not important or productive, and, in recognition of that, as I've indicated earlier, there would be around 15 per cent of the site or almost 100 hectares retained for continuing productive agriculture, and, in particular, it is some of the best and most productive parts of the site that would be retained for cropping in that area closest to the Orange Grove Function Centre.

There would also be continued grazing of sheep during the operations to maintain the productivity of the site as a whole, and there's requirements in our recommended conditions to manage ground cover during operations, but also to restore the land capability to agriculture following any decommissioning. In terms of cumulative impacts on the – on agricultural land as a whole in the LGA, even if all four projects were approved, it would make up around 2300 hectares of disturbance, noting that, of course, there would be requirements to maintain some level of agricultural productivity even during operations, and that proportion is something around, you know, well less than one per cent of the 335,000 hectares of land being used for agriculture within the LGA. And, as I've said, we do see that there is a role and there are examples of solar farm operators being able to maintain a certain level of agricultural productivity during operations.

Next slide, please. So that just shows the agricultural mapping, and I'm happy to answer questions about that in terms of the current process to update the mapping by the Department of Agriculture, but, at the moment, that is the predominant characterisation of the land as class 4 land capability. Next slide, please. Such of the

amenity impacts, look, the key amenity impacts are going to happen during construction rather than operations. That period is around 20 month long, however, there would be more intense times within that 20 month construction period and less intense times. Importantly, our conditions require that all construction is undertaken
5 between 7 and 6 and – Monday to Friday and 8 to 1 on Saturdays so which are the standard construction hours imposed under the recommended guidelines from the EPA and are typical of construction projects more generally.

10 There would be a requirement to minimise the use of the unsealed section of Benambra Road to the north of the site with the primary access adjacent to the sealed part of the – of Benambra Road closes to the Olympic Highway. In terms of the assessment, it – the company has been able to demonstrate that they can generally meet EPA noise criteria during construction except that one residence for a short period where certain activities may hypothetically occur at one time in which case
15 there would be some exceedances and some noise generated above the relevant criteria. In those circumstances, there are a range of mechanisms under the construction noise guidelines to address and minimise those noise impacts including consultation with those affected residences, periods of respite and other potential temporary mitigation measures.

20 In regards to dust, clearly, there would be some disturbance of the site during construction. There's obviously requirement to establish ground cover as quickly as possible over those disturbed areas and during construction to use standard mitigations techniques to minimise dust generation such as water trucks. In terms of
25 cumulative impacts, given the distances associated with Culcairn but particularly Jindera and Glenellen, the department doesn't consider that there would significant noise and dust cumulative impacts because of those separation distances. There may, however, be one receiver that potentially could experience some level of cumulative impacts given that they're located between the Culcairn and the Walla Walla Solar
30 Farms, assuming, of course, that Culcairn is approved, and that's still going through an assessment process at this stage.

Next slide, please. So in terms of some of the other impacts that we've considered and that have been raised by – in submissions, in terms of traffic and transport, we've
35 required the company to use a very specific haulage route for – and traffic route for all of its project related traffic via the Olympic Highway which is obviously a state classified road, and then onto Benambra Road and into the site. As I've said, we've pushed the company to maintain or to consolidate its access to the site to be a principal access point close to the Olympic Highway there. There are limited other
40 areas that will be required for access from time to time for the construction of the substation and so forth but, essentially, it's one main access point to the site. The company has proposed to use shuttle buses to reduce traffic, and, as I said before, limited use of the unsealed section of Benambra Road to the north of the site.

45 There's requirements for road maintenance of local roads and a traffic management plan to be prepared, and, in regard to cumulative impacts, we've had a look at the proposed haulage routes for – and access arrangements for the other solar farms, and,

apart from the Olympic Highway, none of those projects are going to be using the same local roads. So not to say that there's – won't potentially be some risk of cumulative impacts in terms of traffic on the roads, however, the analysis indicates at this stage that there won't be a particular local road that will be sharing project related traffic on more than one project. In regard to biodiversity, as you saw in one of the diagram earlier, the company has sought to retain as much vegetation on the site. I think out of the 90 hectares or so, it's retaining 60 hectares. It will, however, propose – it's proposing to clear approximately 30 hectares of native vegetation, noting that probably only about half of that is woodland, with the other areas mostly being derived – what's called derived native grasslands.

In accordance with the biodiversity offset scheme that has been in place now for a number of years, the company and the conditions that we've recommended to the Commission require those impacts on native vegetation and habitat and species to be offset fully in accordance with that biodiversity offset scheme. Now, it's not to say that the department hasn't assessed other issues, and you will see that in our report, and there are a number of other matters also raised in submissions, including impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage, issues around water supply, bushfire risks, land management, things like weed and pest species, how the project is going to be decommissioned and rehabilitation obligations, where is the workforce going to live, ie, workforce accommodation, concerns about things like heat island effect and so forth.

So there's a range of other matters that the department has assessed, but, for the sake of brevity today, I thought I would just concentrate on some of the key issues that were raised in submissions. Next slide, please. So in regard to those conditions, we have recommended to the Commission a suite of strict conditions that have been developed in consultation with agencies and council. They reflect a standard of conditions, broadly, that the New South Wales government has adopted for the regulation of solar farms. And they include a range of additional management plans that need to be prepared. Things like the landscaping plan to ensure, you know, those benefits associated with vegetation screening traffic, biodiversity, heritage and emergency plans which also deals with things like bushfire risk and so forth.

There's also accommodation and employment strategy to ensure there would be sufficient accommodation to house construction workers which we're confident that there would be, but that would need to be prepared in consultation with council and, obviously, to maximise the benefit to the region strategies for employment of local workers and, indeed, using local businesses where possible. There's other key conditions as I've mentioned around standard construction hours, biodiversity offsets. We've consulted closely with the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue New South Wales to ensure that the development complies with the asset protection requirements, and there's also requirements around decommissioning and rehabilitation at the end of the project life. A requirement to remove all infrastructure within 18 months of ceasing operations so that it doesn't sit there rusting away, so to speak. And also, once decommissioned, then to restore the land to pre-existing agricultural land capability.

Importantly as well, and those conditions don't just sit out there on a piece of paper. There's an entire compliance unit within the department that has the responsibility and role of monitoring and strictly enforcing the conditions of consent should the project be approved, and they would undertake not just monitoring of and reporting, but they would also undertake site inspections particularly during the construction period, and also investigate any complaints that are made. Next slide, please. I think it's important to touch on the benefits of the project, not just some of the concerns about impacts. Obviously, we've talked about the employment construction and operational jobs. The capital investment is significant. \$400 million. Contributions to council of \$2.2 million which I understand would be used for local or community enhancement projects in and around Culcairn and Walla Walla.

That in terms of renewable energy, clearly, the New South Wales government is supportive of the development of renewable energy in the right place, and obviously considering impacts and concerns of the community, and this project would generate enough power – renewable energy to power over 112,000 homes. It would save a significant amount of greenhouse gas, obviously, and there's a range of policies that support the development – sustainable development of renewable energy in New South Wales and at the Commonwealth level, and including even international agreements. So the department, I guess, notes those benefits and the merits of those and the support that the New South Wales government gives to developing these projects subject to proper assessment and also consultation and addressing site constraints and environmental and social and economic impacts.

Next slide, please. So, just in summary, I thought it would be helpful just to summarise the findings or the evaluation of the department's assessment and certainly look forward to hearing from the community about some of their concerns and any feedback they have on the department's assessment or recommended conditions, but, as I said, we've completed a comprehensive whole of government assessment in accordance with the statutory requirements. We've undertaken formal and informal consultation with community – the community and individual landowners, in particular, and, obviously, detailed advice from government agencies including council. We certainly acknowledge that some members of the community, and we will hear that today, remain strongly opposed to the project and absolutely acknowledge that.

However – and we – that they're concerned that there will be some significant environmental and amenity impacts on the local community, particularly in regard to cumulative impacts if a number of these projects go ahead in the locality. And we also acknowledge that council does maintain its objection to the project. However, we do – based on our assessment, we consider that the changes made to the project are material and are significant, and they have addressed – materially reduced the residual impacts of the project particularly on visual impacts on nearby receivers, and also maintaining agricultural productivity on the site on – in some key parts of the – the most productive parts of the site. And we also note that council has confirmed that some of these changes have addressed several of its concerns that it raised in its original submissions, noting, of course, that it still maintains its objections.

Next slide, please. So, finally, I – the department considers that with these changes and the implementation of the conditions that the environmental amenity impacts of the project can be managed to achieve acceptable outcomes noting, of course, that we would be responsible for enforcing those conditions. And we also note that the
5 project would provide significant economic and social benefits to the region and clearly contribute to the transition of our economy away from a reliance on fossil fuels in accordance with New South Wales government and, indeed, Commonwealth policy. And I think it's important to note that 40 per cent of the submissions or I think 42 per cent of the submissions supported the project, so, certainly,
10 acknowledge the concerns of the local community, but there are a number of members within the community that do support the project as well.

So, overall, we consider that the project achieves a reasonable and appropriate balance between maximising the solar resource and the benefits of the project, and
15 also minimising the impacts on the land uses, local residents and the environment. And so we've recommended or found that the project is approvable subject to the recommended conditions. So that's the end of my presentation, thank you, and happy to answer any questions if there's time or separately if we've run out of time.

20 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Mr Young. Appreciate that. Zada, do you have any questions of Mr Young at all?

PROF Z. LIPMAN: No, not really, but I thought you perhaps could elaborate on
25 community concerns around photovoltaic heat island effect and the studies that have been done.

MR YOUNG: Sure. Thank you, Commissioner. I might hand over to perhaps Nicole to answer that question in detail.

30 MS N. BREWER: So the heat island effect is an issue that we looked at. We have used and looked at the other assessments that have been done, particularly by Shepparton Council around the potential heat island effect of solar farms which concluded that there wasn't an impact beyond 30 metres from the solar panels. And so this project doesn't have residences within 30 metres of the solar panels.

35 PROF LIPMAN: Right. Thank you.

MR YOUNG: So I think in – Commission, in addition to that, I guess, you know, the proposed vegetation buffers, the asset protection zones, the setbacks from the site
40 boundary and the proposed vegetation screening, you know, mean that I think that any localised heat island effect, you know, would – wouldn't go, you know, anywhere near any residences or, indeed, other people's land given the setbacks associated with the project.

45 PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your presentation. It's most appreciated. I would now like to call on the applicant's team to present. We have Cliona Gormley, Tarek Al Sampaile and Mike Love from FRV, and also Bridgett Poulton from NGH Consulting. The applicant's team has been given 30 minutes to present.

MS GORMLEY: Good morning everyone. My name is Cliona Gormley and I am the development manager for the proposed Walla Walla Solar Farm, and today I have Tarek with me, Mark from FRV and Bridgette from NGH. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of FRV and the Walla Walla Solar Farm, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the community members who have registered to speak today. This has been a long journey and even if your submission is to support or object to the proposal, I want everyone to know that the feedback throughout the process has been appreciated, and it has helped create a balanced, considered, considerate detailed design. For the presentation today, I wish to provide the following information.

So Tarek will start of with a short description from FRV, and detail experience – our own experience and approach to responsible developments. Next, then, we will move onto why renewable energy. Thirdly, what consultation has occurred for this particular project. And, lastly, what were the main neighbour issues raised and how has FRV addressed these issues. So I will just move on to Tarek.

MR SAMPAILLE: Thank you, Cliona. Thank you everyone. A brief introduction about FRV. FRV started in Australia in 2010. It was the first large utility scale solar farm to start solar farm developer – developments in Australia. Our first development was in the ACT, and that was the Royalla Solar Farm. It was the first project under the Australian flagship program, and from there we moved to our second solar farm. That's Moree Solar Farm in New South Wales which was also supported by Arena. That was completed in 2015. From there, we expanded our delivery pipeline to deliver another five projects across the country, and worth mention that we commissioned last year the Goonumbla Solar Farm in New South Wales, and we are currently having the Sebastopol Solar Farm in New South Wales under construction. Cliona, over to you.

MS GORMLEY: Thanks, Tarek. So just to elaborate, so we've successfully advanced seven solar farms across Australia, and in each of these areas we've settled in as a proactive and positive member of the community sharing social, environmental and economic benefits. For example, as you can see from the photo shared, we work in partnership with local stakeholders. This is a trip organised between FRV and the Moree Secondary College in New South Wales. The students received a two day educational tour around the Moree Solar Farm with FRV members providing sessions on the impact of climate change, and how renewable solutions can help mitigate this crisis. So FRV's business model is a key and important benefit with – which distinguishes us from other developers. We will be the long term owner where we will oversee the development, construction and operations of the Walla Walla Solar Farm.

Move one. Secondly, why renewable energy. So there is no planet B. It is imperative that we obtain our energy from clean renewable energy and move away from fossil fuels if we have any chance of combatting climate change. We are already witnessing the devastating effects today with the bleaching of to the uncontrollable bushfires, and this is why we see such a change in community attitudes. So there's an 83 per cent of New South Wales community want renewables. This is why solar farm developments are a perfect solution as they can co-exist with sheep grazing, and, therefore, an area can be – produce both food and energy. It allows farmers to increase and diversity revenue without taking land out of the food production. Unlike other energy developments such as coal and nuclear plants which completely damage the land for the long term, a solar development can easily be removed and the land restored to its traditional farming practices.

These developments help meet future national electricity demands and put a downward pressure on prices. They also bring direct benefits to local areas with the creation of diversification of jobs and income to local services. So then I want to move on to how FRV approached consultation for this project. FRV took over the project in July 2019. Immediately we stopped the clock so that we could complete our own due diligence, and, in particular, consult with the community. There was evidence that there was a high level of misinformation regarding solar farm developments in general within the community, and many concerns were raised. So then FRV sought a very open and collaborative approach to try and address this. The feedback received was considered and practical and reasonable design changes were made as a result. Our team has worked really hard to accommodate neighbour concerns throughout this process.

The consultation included one to one meetings around kitchen tables, for the wider community where we made available key team members including the head of construction of FRV so that individuals had the opportunity to ask direct questions to these key members. Meetings with community groups also occurred, and we provided a presentation to local councillors and met with local council on a regular basis. We also provide – provided a website, a fact sheet, a frequently asked questions document and everyone had direct email and phone numbers to FRV team members. Community engagement is still occurring today and, if approved, will continue throughout the life of this project.

So next I want to move on to kind of highlight how this feedback has dramatically changed the design of this proposal from when FRV acquired this design. So, as you can see, there's dramatic changes but I have put it into a table format, and we can go through in detail, but please ask me if you want to move back to this – these images for further clarity. So there – the key issues that were raised by adjacent neighbours were site access and traffic, visual screening, noise, biodiversity, weed management, fire management and property value. We tried to resolve this through direct engagement, design modification, reduction in footprint, improved construction approach. The wider community had concerns regarding the use of agricultural land, impact on landscape character, loss of economic activity from reduced farming, heat island effect, biodiversity loss and cumulative impacts.

So, again, we sought to provide factual and a clear information approach and engage with stakeholders on a regular basis. So to go through some of the key main concerns that were raised and how we have adapted that original design to what you see today. So first of all, there was the issue of traffic during construction. So I will
5 take you back to the main drawing, and I wonder if I can – so originally when we took over the project, there was three main access points proposed, and concerns were raised from neighbours for the unnecessary travel of vehicles along the Benambra Road which would have caused dust and noise. So what FRV has done is closed these three main access points and created one main access point in the north
10 eastern corner of the project, and this is to avoid any unnecessary impact on these residences along the Benambra Road.

So I will go back. So, secondly, then was – this is not working. Sorry. There we go. So, secondly, then was actual traffic during the operations and the locations of the
15 O&M buildings as a result. So FRV have moved their O&M buildings from the proposed substation over to the main entrance. So, again, this will remove the long term impact of any traffic travelling along the Benambra Road. Next was setback from infrastructure. So, again, originally there wasn't any setbacks proposed. So what FRV has looked at the three main receptors, R1, R2 and R5, and seen where we
20 can implement a significant setback, and, in particular, for Orange Grove Gardens where a lot of submissions raised a concern for the visuals. A setback of 1.8 kilometres has been proposed. We also then looked at visual screening because before there was limited or to no screening proposed for these individuals, and what FRV has done is implemented a extensive 50 metre buffer for these three receptors,
25 and that will include six rows of trees and a detailed landscaping plan.

And this goes over and beyond what you will see across solar farms across Australia because the standard would be one to two rows of trees. We also tried to mitigate concerns and add offered advanced planting to these three receptors, but they
30 declined and would like to obviously find the final determination of this project first. Next concern was the removal of farm dams. So, again, we have altered the design and we will now retain 15 out of the 17 dams on site, 10 of which we will enhance. The next was the visual of the security fence. So, again, what we've done is set this back from the legal boundary. So that there will be vegetation of the existing
35 remained, and then the proposed vegetation will also be in place between the legal boundary and the security fence, and we have also removed the barbed wire from the top of the security fence as well.

So moving on to the impact on Orange Grove Gardens, this was a key consideration
40 throughout consultation, and a key concern that had been raised. So what has been implemented, the 1.8 kilometre setback will be in place and the south east corner that is being retained will be retained for cropping. And so, therefore, R5 will be able to continue utilising the surrounding views for their business. We continue to welcome official dates of any weddings or bookings from the Orange Grove Gardens, and we
45 can take that into consideration during the construction management plan. There is also then the 15 metre visual screening that is still proposed, and, as I said, the advanced screen planting had been offered. There is also a 10,000 energy

contribution payment offer to the three main receptors, and there was also photomontages provided to the Orange Grove Gardens.

5 So, next, we go onto biodiversity protection. FRV have proposed 120 nesting
boxes throughout the project. Again, no barbed wire will be on the FRV security
fence. We will retain additional paddock trees. Tree planting has been really
considered and we've worked very closely with the Holbrook Landcare, and what we
have really tried to do is insert visual vegetation where it can connect to existing
10 vegetation to create wildlife corridors. And more detail of this can obviously be
found in the EIS and we – as we have created a biodiversity strategy for the project.
Next, a key concern was the location of the substation. So when FRV took on the
project, we re-investigated this location and we have moved the infrastructure 100
metres south of its original location, and now it will be – the substation will be 950
metres from the R2 residence.

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Next, fire protection. So there was a real concern from the community of the risk of
fire of this asset. This is an extremely viable asset and FRV will be doing everything
in our power to protect it and the surrounding areas. So there will be a 10 metre fire
asset protection zone throughout the perimeter of the project. There will be 60,000
20 litres of portable water which will be stored at all times for fire fighting purposes.
There will be a detailed fire management plan implemented prior to construction, and
will be done in consultation with the RFS. The RFS will also be inducted to the
project and will be consulted throughout that process. There is also 24/7 surveillance
on this project, and there is additional gates added for fire emergencies.

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So next we move onto the concern around agricultural land. FRV noted this and we
also consider it to be a key importance that food production does still occur, and this
is why we really support these projects, because they can co-exist. So a study was
carried out and actually all – everything that – all infrastructure, all the vegetation
30 that we are implementing onto this land, it takes up less than 15 per cent of the land.
That means the rest of the land can still be utilised, and we are seeing across all our
projects that grass is growing right up until underneath the panels. So we also, with
the change of the setback for Orange Grove Gardens, have retained the most
productive area of 95 hectares which will be retained for cropping land. And it's
35 also noted as before that this land can be restored and will go back to its original
state. And we note obviously there is a dispute regarding the class, but it is classified
as 4 and 6.

40 Noise has been raised as a concern as well. So FRV noted for the nearest receptor,
R1, and we implemented a 400 metre exclusion zone for this property. A
detailed construction noise management plan will be developed. This is likely to
include mitigation measures like the use of noise barriers, alternative work practises
and clear processes for consulting with neighbours. Again, we have also committed
to providing a dedicated neighbourhood liaison officer which will visit on at least a
45 weekly basis to ensure that the occupants feel comfortable regarding the noise levels
during construction. And the project will also be restricted to certain construction
hours.

I want to move on to also then – heat island effect was raised with concerns regarding the eastern boundary. So, as discussed, there is a 30 metre setback provided. There is also vegetation along that eastern boundary, and FRV had proposed an addition five metre vegetation screening to complement this. We have
5 provided additional information regarding the technology and the heat island effect to this neighbour and other residences as well. It’s worth noting that the dwelling and the owner lives over two kilometres away from the legal boundary of this project. And I will just move back as well to note that, obviously, the eastern
10 boundary, as you can see the southern section is no longer in any way part or impacted due to the removal of the south east corner.

So next onto property value. This is a reasonable concern and one that we see across all projects, but there is no evidence of any devaluation of properties located next to solar farms. The – and, in actual fact, we find time and time again that property
15 prices are not based on the neighbouring land and actual agricultural production. So we find that from a study that was carried out. And we also want to note that all the changes that have been implemented above this point have been carried out to protect all neighbouring properties. Then financial contribution. So it was a key for us to ensure that the benefit is shared within the community. So the three main receptors,
20 they have all been offered 10,000 energy contribution one off payments. There is also now the that council receive the rates revenue associated with the solar farm. And we have also worked closely with the local council and created a VPA which is worth over 2.7 million throughout the lifetime of this project.

And within that we’ve really tried to structure the agreement to ensure that this money is utilised and really benefits the community, and put into categories of where these funds will go. And I would also like to note that one of these categories is for local businesses. So local businesses such as the Orange Grove Gardens and other
25 businesses can, on a yearly basis, of these grants. There is also then the boost to the local economy. So local accommodation and other services will avail, and there will be 250 construction jobs on offer and 21 fulltime operation jobs. And, as the
30 development manager, I’m on a weekly basis getting calls from local people and from the region who are interested in this project. So, in conclusion, we are extremely proud of this final design of this project. One which is clearly considered
35 and addressed the feedback from the community, and a project which will deliver benefits for all, not only a local level but regionally and nationally. Thank you for your time and I’m happy to take any questions the Commissioners may have.

MR HUTTON: Thank you very much for that presentation. I do have one question
40 in relation – or a point of clarification in relation to the crossing points for the internal road across back creek. When we were on site there it’s currently quite a narrow crossing, a farm style crossing, which we understand. We’re trying to – could you describe to us what that permanent crossing might look like from a structure in terms of, I guess, the work to be done on the roadway, but also the
45 crossing and culverts, just to understand what that might look like. If someone from your team could talk to us.

MS GORMLEY: Yes. As the known engineer of the group, I will pass that question on. If Mark could be unmuted, please.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mark.

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MR M. LOVE: Thank you. Yes. The stream crossing at the moment, Commissioner what will happen but generally and what we will do with the stream, we will look at the flow undertake a study of the and then we will work out the size of the concrete culverts that need to be used. It might be one or two, possibly three. So it will be three – two or three pipes then a on top of that and then probably finish bluestone covering. But there will have to be design the weight of the inverters through the site and all the other equipment But that will be subject to a separate design under the construction management plan.

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MR HUTTON: Okay. So would you expect that there would need to be some clearing of the existing vegetation to allow that construction to occur, and, if so, has that been factored into the BDAR assessment or the assessment of the ecological impacts?

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MR LOVE: I think there be some slight It's difficult to say that actually physically the actual vegetation on site but I'm pretty sure that we've got it under the – some allowances make it under the BDAR calculation. I'm looking at - - -

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MS GORMLEY: Yes.

MR LOVE: - - -

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MS GORMLEY: I can confirm it has been factored in and Bridgette can confirm that as well.

MR HUTTON: Okay. All right, thank you. I don't have any other questions of the applicant.

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PROF LIPMAN: Can I just - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

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PROF LIPMAN: - - - note on that. It is intended that the internal road will be used during construction for all vehicles including the oversize vehicles, and will it be used for water trucks?

MS GORMLEY: Yes.

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MR LOVE: Yes. For – yes. So all the solar farm construction trucks will come through the site through the main entrance and then cross right through the site. The only oversize vehicles not using the site will be for the substation.

PROF LIPMAN: Right. So how wide would the crossing be in that case?

MR LOVE: I think four to five metres. It would probably be a normal size crossing.

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PROF LIPMAN: Right. And just one other question on this. You mentioned that in relation to the three receptors you've made a \$10,000 energy contribution offer. When did this happen and is it a formal agreement and has it been accepted? And what does it actually involve?

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MS GORMLEY: It was provided a number of months ago, but we haven't had any acceptance from any of the three receptors. And it would involve a one off payment, and they would be able to use that money towards energy bills or if they would – any solar panel rooftop installations. It would – that was the idea behind it.

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PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: All right. Thank you very much for your presentation today. We're just going to take a brief break and we will be back shortly. Thank you.

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ADJOURNED

[11.00 am]

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RESUMED

[11.07 am]

MR HUTTON: Thank you and welcome back. I'd now like to call the fourth speaker, speaker number 3 is not speaking. Number 4, Andrew Williams. He has five minutes. Thank you, Andrew.

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MR WILLIAMS: Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Andrew Williams. With my wife we co-own 92 hectares of land proposed to be lease to FRV for the purpose of a solar farm. My wife and I have farmed together on a small scale for about 37 years, and of those years lately in the last 11 years, we've been farming on a larger scale, having acquired our property in Walla Walla. I come from a long list of farming – farmers in The Mallee area where they farmed wheat and sheep. My wife holds an advanced diploma in farm management from Melbourne University. So we are very enthusiastic farmers. We care about what we do, and we think that agriculture has a very bright future.

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Now, there are some additional items that I'd just like to touch on that have been canvassed, but require a bit more discussion. The first is that our land will still produce food, continued grazing of sheep under the solar panels. The soils on the portion of our land set aside for the solar farm is officially mapped as class 4, and consistent with that classification and our own direct knowledge of our own farm in the 11 years that we have owned the property, it has never been cropped by us, but

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has been resold to pasture and continually fertilised. It has also been grazed by sheep and cattle as being the most appropriate enterprise.

5 We have on occasions produced grazing fodder as part of our pasture renovation program. FRV has calculated that the solar farm infrastructure will consume about 15 per cent of the surface area of the land, being 85 per cent available for grazing of sheep. The actual carrying capacity will vary from year to year, depending on the season. The grazing of sheep is successfully taking place on solar farms in Dubbo and Parkes and Victoria. The results of trials on the Parkes Solar Farm showed that
10 sheep were successful in reducing weeds and grass, as well as providing an income stream for farmers.

FRV has also made a large number of changes to the project in response to objections, and while we appreciate and understand that no objecting neighbour will
15 be fully satisfied, the relocation of the substation behind existing vegetation, the planting of wider vegetation screens and the relocation of the main entrance to the project much further to the east to reduce the impact of traffic movements has greatly improved the amenity of our neighbours. Yes. On some other points, in terms of the employment opportunities in the area. The coronavirus has – induced recession has
20 heightened the urgent need for private equity investment to create jobs locally. In a report delivered to the Albury City Council by REMPLAN in June 2020, it was estimated that about 6000 jobs had been lost in our area due to COVID-19. There have been other job losses not connected with COVID-19, such as Norska Sporg shutting down causing a loss of 185 job. This project addresses that need by
25 providing 250 jobs during construction and 16 ongoing jobs. In addition, the region will benefit generally by the flow-on effect of expenditure of goods and services.

In terms of power prices, I note that in South Australia where renewables dominate the energy grid, wholesale prices have fallen so the consumers in that State are
30 paying lower prices for power than those in New South Wales or Victoria. The construction of this and other solar farms in New South Wales will lead to New South Wales consumers receiving the benefit of cheaper power prices. Furthermore, more – recently more countries and large corporations have adopted the goal of net zero emissions by 2050. The countries include Japan and United Kingdom and
35 companies and organisations include BHP and the National Farmers Federation. This belief in the science of global warming and our decision to support this project is a contribution toward reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees.

40 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Williams. The time is almost up. I just ask you to wrap it up there, please.

MR WILLIAMS: Yes. Thank you. I've completed my comments.

45 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you very much, Mr Williams, we appreciate your presentation today. I'd now like to call Josh Godde to speak. Josh has been given five minutes. Thank you, Josh.

MR GODDE: Yes. Thank you. I'm a local contractor. I've been asked to speak. I've worked on three solar farms around Numurkah, Sunraysia and the Balranald Solar Farm, which is reasonably sized. I'm, sort of, speaking up for the local community, because I know a lot of the farmers. We're local farmers, as well. A lot
5 of local farmers are up in arms about the, you know, taking good land away from solar, but I'm speaking in – on behalf of the local community in contractors and what else can happen in the community, like, I mean Culcairn at the moment, while I'm a Culcairn resident, the clubs are doing it hard, the pubs are doing it hard. The corona has hit a lot of people. Shut a lot of shops down, and what I've seen a solar farm
10 brings to a local community is just unbelievable.

It might only be a two-year turnaround, but what that two years will bring to a local community I've seen is just – yes, I think it's just going to be a great thing to – either to a small town, whether Walla, Culcairn, all the surrounding areas, yes, and that's
15 really what I'm going in at is, yes, it's – so local contractors. What I've seen from the suppliers and everything, the builders of the farms have always used – try and engage local contractors. All the earthmoving contractors have been in the local area were on these farms, and I think once the people come to town, the community actually could see that it is actually a good thing.

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Though I know Balranald, they were up in arms about it, too. They didn't want it there, but once they come to town they realised what a good thing it was and how it turned the town around and, yes, so I'm just – think it's going to be a good thing for the local community and so that's all I've got to say, really.

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MR HUTTON: All right. Thank you, Mr Godde. Appreciate that. Okay. Thank you. We'll move onto the next speaker, speaker number 6, which is Trish Feuerherdt. Trish is associated with the Orange Grove Gardens development, so thank you, Trish. You've been allocated 15 minutes.

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MS T. FEUERHERDT: Okay. Good morning, Chairman and member, members of the panel. Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in relation to the Walla Walla Solar application. I live at Orange Grove Gardens, 5a – R5a, a neighbouring property on the south-eastern boundary of the proposed development.
35 10 years ago we built a function centre that has been successful since opening, currently employing 19 staff with a mix of full-timers, part-timers and a pool of casuals we scale up and down for functions. In 2017 we put in a DA for ecolodges, three currently in operations with the final two arriving in the next six months. The function centre and ecolodges face north and sit nine storeys elevated over the lowest
40 point of the solar development. The north facing end of my function room has 12 metres of glass sliding doors that open out to a 12 by six metre deck that offers 180 degree views of the countryside, which half of this view comprises of the proposed solar development.

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The first time FRV came to my property we walked around the gardens, through the function room and like every other person that visits the venue, standing at the railing and look out across the countryside. The first thing that was said to me was, "Wow,

what an amazing view”. My response to Sarah and Cliona was, “Pretty you want – pity you want to put a solar farm out the front”. I can still remember both of them looking at me with nothing to say to my comment. The same reaction happens when brides and grooms view the property. The walking out on the deck is normally what seals the deal.

From the start of the process, Orange Grove Gardens was left out of the scoping report, yet they had been spoken to by the council about surrounding neighbours and businesses. FRV met with us initially, told us they had been given all notes on us, but wanted to listen to our concerns. When a 50 metre tree line was proposed originally on the southern boundary we built a five metre hay wall on this boundary to demonstrate that due to the elevation of Orange Grove the proposed 50 metre tree line would make minimal impact on the visual aspect from the function room.

The EIS has within 10 years the tree line would be four metres high, which is less than that of the hay wall. Time after time we continue to ask one question: how are you going to protect our business. Across the course of the process from different people we received the following responses: we were told that it was great for the community, they were putting squirrel boxes in, removing barbed wire from the top of the fence. We were told that we could tell our potential customers that it looks like a vineyard. When we asked how we were supposed to secure weddings with a construction site out the front the response was that if our business failed it was because we could not sell it.

We even proposed the current setback as a possibility to FRV prior to the EIS being submitted and were told no, that they would take their chances with the Department of Planning. We read in the council documents that three of the four neighbours had been offered an energy grant of \$10,000, which neither R2 or ourselves had ever heard of. We had questioned FRV on the off-the-grid systems offered by Bison and advised that they did not engage in compensation as it was considered a bribe. Letters were then sent to us after we questioned what had been told to the council, which was a contradiction to the original conversation about compensation.

While the function centre has already been impacted because of this proposal, it is only part of our business and we are also farmers first. Thought the – through the consultation phase we asked the company about the data. Like anyone else who is buying a car, investing in property, running a business, you do your research. We requested data reports on the heat island effect, micro climate changes, decommissioning, what panels would be used, reflection, spacing and dust. We were advised by FRV that they’d been in Australia for a number of years and had done internal studies on their own sites, yet nothing has been handed over. In the end, we were advised it would be addressed in the EIS.

May I remind everyone that this is a 361-page document and we are expected to trawl through to find the answers. I have official emails and letters from FRV answering questions or putting words to questions, but there was never anything to back up or clarify what they claimed. We were sent pictures of sheep grazing out the

front of – on the outskirts of panels, panoramic views, distorted pictures from our deck, which has tree that sits east of the function room in the picture, yet could not be provided with stock numbers per acre or how they dealt with animal husbandry under panels.

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Weed control. We had to send pictures of hairy panic to explain this weed. We raised us concerns due to the way the winds blow. The response was, “We will have to ask someone to check the wind directions”. God forbid we live here every day and know predominantly which way they blow. All four neighbours raised concerns about each other’s issues and were told that this was being discussed with them and not something they were willing to discuss with us. So much for this being about the community and an open and honest process.

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In March this year was the final straw for us, for all of us, when we were advised by FRV that in our best interests they had agreement with – from the land owner that they could start planting the boundary tree lines. This sent most of us over the edge. There has been – had been no consultation. We had no recommendation from the Department of Planning and yet they were securing their boundaries prior to approval. We felt like we were being bullied, trampled on and had not been given the right of process. Looking at the visual and dust impact, please see figures 2 and 3. I’m not sure I sent it through earlier. One is from a dust storm from the solar farm in Bomen. We are told that they do not disturb the soil, yet they have to remove ridiculous amounts of trees, spray everything and then pound the poles in. The next step is to dig the trenches between the poles. The ground has no growth and the soil has been disturbed.

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Trucks moving internally. My question to the panel: what quantifies an acceptable level of dust. With noise, there are measurable parameters in decibels. What are the parameters with dust. What can we use to measure what is acceptable. If the wind is blowing west-northwest, then my glass doors and function room are in the firing line. The cabin is in exactly the same situation. These are off-the-grid, so am I going to have to have someone cleaning my off-grid systems daily to make them efficient. Cleaning function room glass doors, unable to open the sliding glass doors to utilise the deck, washing down my house and not being able to open my own windows.

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In my research of other projects, NGH seem to do most of the EIS reports of solar developments, which raises concerns on where is the independence. The Walla Walla report referenced a different shire, intersections that are over 300 kilometres away. What guidelines are they bound by for deciding if the impact is low, medium or high. The next figure is an aerial shot of my homestead. As you can see, all the trees are green, protecting the house. The report has my property in dense foliage, so my visual impact is low, yet in April the trees lose their leaves and my homestead is exposed. FRV were advised that the trees are deciduous. Given my homestead faces north, I can stand on my veranda and see Mountain View, R2, the home on the north-west corner of the project. The trees don’t leaf up until mid-September, so from April to September am I still low impact if I have view – a full view of this development.

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What is considered acceptable and what independent guidelines quantify this, or are we expected to accept that just because a company says so, then that is enough. The substation is no difference. There are four pylons within the plan. All could have access from Schneiders Road. Currently it has been placed on Benambra Road,
5 closest to the neighbour R2a, also the furthest point north from the landowners that have leased the land. Again, the visual was first used as the reason for this placement, then the harmonics of the lines, but yet no one has provided anything to verify this. No one went to Mountain View, R2, to see the view when the assessment was done by the energy company, yet on this pylon it is not visual to the landowners
10 that have leased the land, yet it is very visual to the neighbouring property.

Given that there has never been a verified reason or joint assessment leaves consideration open: is this a landowner contractual requirement. If it is or is not, how is this in the best interest of the community if the most impacted person is the
15 neighbour. The substation is not like the panels. This is a permanent structure. It is there irrespective if the solar development is removed in 30 years time. It will always remain. Given this is permanent, should this not have been independently assessed for the best location and not decided by the proponent.

20 Continuing with visual, we have been told that there is no glare. This may be true or minimal if the sun is directly above in the sky, but what happens in September, October, November or other times when the sun is due north as the panels rotate back. What about the back glare. There are two investigations underway by the EPA and department of planning over the Bomen Solar Farm because of the back
25 glare and the water runoff caused by the flat surface of the panels, yet we are two and a half times larger, and hobby farmers have built their homes on the Tabletop Ridge facing west overlooking the solar farm. How will they be affected by this. Are they aware of this issue, given we have been told there is no glare.

30 So I ask the panel as a ratepayer, taxpayer, businessowner, where is the government independent reports and guidelines and measurable parameters to what determines low, medium and high impact in these assessments. I also ask what are the parameters around the cumulative effect on the community. Mountain View R2 will have a substation out the front if approved, and to the north another solar
35 development with the Culcairn Solar project. If, like Bomen, there is a water runoff issue because of the flat surface of the panels, this runs directly into their property. What consideration is taken for the impacts they will have combined by this.

If this is good for the community, then why did 41 people within five kilometres
40 object to the development, and only 14 people support it within the five ks. Isn't the close community the ones who really matter the most; it is not the direct – is it not the direct neighbours that have to live with this day in and day out. The consideration for the farmland that surrounds this is people's businesses and their livelihoods, yet we are expected to accept words with no backing to put our minds at
45 ease. How can you remove 200,000 panels and still produce the same power, yet not know the specifics to the panels you will be using. We were told that the spacing would not be varied, that they are just removing the panels and using a more efficient

panel, yet we are led to believe the panel has been advised these panels are being placed closer together, which then raises concerns about the heat generated as the airflow is reduced.

5 Why if this has been in operation in New South Wales has the government not commissioned studies on possible impacts. This is not a few hundred panels. It is kilometres of them in a non-energy zone, reliable non-integrated farming land that has the ability to produce in droughts. We are not denying that there will be short term benefit to the community, but the long-term effect is not proven as a benefit.
10 Communities, neighbours have already divided. Does the short-term benefits you will hear about today from others in the community negate the impact on my established business, projected growth and long term relationships with my suppliers and employees that I engage. This process has shown a lack of respect for the neighbours and the community.

15 The consultation has merely been a tick in the box exercise and changes have been minimal and fairly standard changes made across other developments, such as removing barbed wire from fences, which is a fairly standard land care requirement for establishment of new tree blocks, while not specifically covering concerns of the
20 community or providing data to back their claims. This is not an argument about what a landowner can do with their property. This is land currently classified as rural farmland, not industrial land. This will change the environment forever. It has already changed our community. We are asking for some independence. We are asking for some validation, and asking you to help protect my business that I have
25 spent 10 years building, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars establishing the infrastructure from scratch to coexist within this current environment with no impact to any of my neighbours.

30 When all this begun and muds were starting to be flung and my business was attacked online for opposing this development, after losing my first function from this I offered for everyone in the community to come and stand on my deck of my function centre and look at this from my perspective. That offer was made in an open social media forum. Not one person who's speaking in favour of this today took me up on that offer or made contact with me to try and see this my perspective.

35 I took the time to visit six different solar projects at different stages of development. During sunrise through to sunset to try to give me some perspective on how this will affect my business and lives before I made my submission. I am here not only for myself and my family, my neighbours and those that support my business in the
40 community, but for those employ, suppliers I engage and for the hope that the natural resources we are blessed with here are not turned into an industrial site. My apologies, but thank you.

45 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mrs Feuerherdt. Appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today. I'd just like to move onto speaker 7, which is Adrian –

PROF LIPMAN: Andrew.

MR HUTTON: Sorry. Apologies. A quick question from Commissioner Lipman.

PROF LIPMAN: I just – is Trish still there?

5 MS T. FEUERHERDT: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: Sorry, Trish, I just wanted to elaborate – you to elaborate on the offer that you've been made, the \$10,000 grant for energy contribution. Could you tell me whether you have taken that up or whether there has been a formal offer to
10 you.

MS T. FEUERHERDT: The formal offer was made – I was sent a letter after we found out that they told the council that they would do it. We had originally been offered by Bison complete off-the-grid systems for all of the neighbouring properties
15 and, no, we did not take that, because for us it's – for what they're doing to us, 10,000 is just – it's a piece of – it's nothing to them.

PROF LIPMAN: All right.

20 MR HUTTON: Okay.

MS T. FEUERHERDT: So the offer was made. I think some offer was made even after EIS went in.

25 MR HUTTON: Okay.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank - - -

MS T. FEUERHERDT: That was only after we questioned the company.
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PROF LIPMAN: Thank you very much, Trish.

MR HUTTON: Thank you very much. Thank you for your time, again, today. It's appreciated.
35

MS T. FEUERHERDT: Thanks.

MR HUTTON: I'd now like to move to speaker 7, Adrian Feuerherdt, who has been allocated five minutes, also representing the Orange Grove Gardens. Thanks,
40 Adrian.

MR A. FEUERHERDT: Yes. Hi, Adrian Feuerherdt. I'm a – I'm a third generation farmer. I live with Trish, who you just heard speak, with our three boys who plan on being the fourth generation of farmers. I've got a number of concerns
45 from heat island effect, fire risks through hairy panic we just talked about, wildlife, as in kangaroos, wedge-tailed eagles, rabbits and foxes, vermin and, in particular, the hydrology of the areas and the carrying capacity. So I'll touch on hydrology first,

and I'm sure when you come to visit that you were taken to the worst part of the place, but I'm sure that you would've seen some very productive land.

5 On our farm we have some of that lower lying country, as well, and probably not so productive, but it can be productive with work and we're working on that, and so the land classification, I don't think is 100 per cent correct with what they're doing, but, basically, with the hydrology, with the amount of trees that are being taken out, it is wetter lower lying areas down there, and I'm sure you would have seen that, but you take the trees out, which – and I'm sure that you're familiar with the fact that trees
10 are water pumps that pump the water out of the ground. With those lower lying areas, are they going to be increasing the water table, which increases salinity, and then, sort of, degrading more of our areas, neighbours, myself, Dorothy Hoy and so on, and particular downstream.

15 We are upstream from the solar development. My cousin, Shay, is downstream and he gets some wet areas, too, and if more water runs off there, I think it's going to have a detrimental effect on his farming land and the way he can – yes, can run his farm, and again what are the acceptable levels of increased water, increased runoff and stuff like that. I think that should be clarified and how – work out how it can be
20 measured. And, for instance, digging some test holes to see where the water table is at and study it for 12 months so we know we can get a baseline on – not only on the proponent's – on the footprint of the solar panels, but also on neighbouring properties, too, to see if it is affecting us, because if it does affect us, we're – and they're saying that it's not – they're saying it's not and it does, they're just going to
25 say, "Well, the solar panels in now, so sorry about that", which, yes.

So I'd like to know who we can then go to to say, "Well, it has affected us more than you said. It has had a detrimental effect on our carrying capacity and our productivity", and, yes, so I just want to know where that can be rectified, and
30 talking about carrying capacity. The components are claiming that they're going to maintain 80 per cent of the agricultural capacity within the footprint of the solar panels, and I think it talks about sheep in the proposal. Well, cattle should be taken into consideration, as well. Cattle can't run under solar panels. I understand that, but at – you can evaluate it on a DSE, a dry stock equivalent rate. So one sheep is
35 virtually one DSE. Cattle can be anywhere between nine to 15. Depends if it's a cow and calf lactating and stuff like that, and I know he runs a lot of cattle over there at – on Mr Phegan's place, and so that should be able to, yes, be taken into consideration.

40 And it should be truly independent. Not FRV doing an analysis. I think somebody should be appointed by you guys to actually get a carrying capacity DSE that – that which – yes, then it can be actually translated back to – yes, to see what that 80 per cent of capacity actually is, and the – at the point 13, the land management, clause (c):

45 *Maintaining grazing within development footprint where applicable, unless the secretary agrees otherwise.*

Now, if they plan on running sheep underneath these panels, I think that clause is obsolete. They've said it can be done elsewhere. It can be done quite successfully at other sites, so applicably – the secretary – I don't even know who the secretary is and what goes on to actually – to make that decision, but it should be unique to that site.

5 If it's not taken out, that clause isn't taken out of the proposal at all, it can also at least have reasons in there. Specific reasons why they might be able to take those – not have sheep underneath the panels, which is going to have to be unique to that site, because they say sheep can run under panels elsewhere, so such thing as chewing the wires, that's not unique to that site. That shouldn't be a reason to take
10 sheep out from underneath the panels.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Feuerherdt, we're almost out of time, or we are out of time. Have you got just a final remark.

15 MR A. FEUERHERDT: Yes. No, that'll just about do, so – yes, I pretty much got most of what - - -

MR HUTTON: Great.

20 MR A. FEUERHERDT: - - - I wanted to say out of the way, but, yes, I really want some measuring and accountability to the impact that it's going to have on farmers.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

25 MR A. FEUERHERDT: Where those measurements come, how we measure it and what's low, what's high and where – who's going to fix those problems or give compensation.

MR HUTTON: Okay. All right. Well, thank you very much for your time and for
30 putting time into the presentation today. It is appreciated. Thanks very much.

MR A. FEUERHERDT: No worries.

MR HUTTON: We'll move to speaker number 8, which is Nick Conway. Nicks'
35 been given five minutes.

MR CONWAY: G'day, how you doing. I actually went for a drive out to the farm yesterday just to be sure I was clear that Danny's proposal was covering all the environmental benefits I'd hope to see out there, which I'm now clear that it is, but I
40 just wanted to provide my support to the project. I've got five kids, one just finishing year 12, getting very, very good marks, but at the same time really struggling to get a job, and the economic benefit from the jobs that this project could provide in time, particularly to the community of Walla, but to people in the surrounding districts, as well, is going to be too good an opportunity to pass up, and
45 knowing full well that I've got a daughter doing very, very well at school, yet struggling to find a job, that means more to me than plenty at the moment. So I just wanted to get on here and provide my support and hopefully we can get this through.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Conway. That concludes your presentation?

MR CONWAY: That does, thank you.

5 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Mr Conway. Appreciate it. So thank you, everybody. We're going to have a schedule 20 minute break, and then we'll be back at 12.15. Thank you very much.

10 **ADJOURNED** [11.39 am]

RESUMED [12.14 pm]

15 MR HUTTON: Welcome back to the Walla Walla Solar Farm Project public meeting. We'd now like to call speaker 9, which is Glen Takle. He has 15 minutes. Glen, are you there?

20 MR TAKLE: Yes. Yes.

MR HUTTON: Thanks, Glen. Thank you.

25 MR TAKLE: Thanks. I'm Glen Takle from Walla. I've got a small property here. I've worked in this area for most of me life, after – working life, sorry, for myself. I've put a heap of apprentices through their time, and I've been through there, had a look at the solar farm and everything. I've even ridden through on the horse through the property and I reckon it's a good idea, and I don't – I reckon it's really good for the community, and I can only see benefits from it, not – there aren't any disbenefits
30 from it, really. Good for the town and the community to bring more workers into the town and hopefully we can end up with a few more families here in the end, and so that's all I could see is a benefit for it, really. Sorry, I haven't got 15 minutes, but that's about as much as I can really say. I'm all for it.

35 MR HUTTON: Yes. Sorry, Glen, it was five minutes, but thank you. Sorry about that.

MR TAKLE: Righto. Yes.

40 MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR TAKLE: Yes. Not a problem. Yes. I can only see benefits for it, I can't see anything against it, really. Yes.

45 MR HUTTON: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your time today. It's appreciated. If that's all, we might move onto the next speaker. The next speaker is speaker number 10, which is Dorothy Hoy, five minutes. Thank you, Mrs Hoy.

MS HOY: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the panel, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. This has been well documented that there are vast areas in Australia of far more suitable land on which to erect solar project than the very fertile, productive agricultural land in this area. Even our shire councillors express the view:

That prime agricultural land should be for growing food. There are plenty of areas in Australia that don't grow the type of feed we have see in this area.

10 My main concern with this proposed project, if constructed, is for the welfare of the livestock in the heat of summer and the lack of consideration from the proponents for me as a neighbour for protection. The weather and prevailing hot summer winds come predominantly from the west, northwest, consequently the extra temperature during the day coming directly off the vast area of approximately 600 hectares of panels needs to be addressed with the protection of an effective vegetation green.

15 This, in theory, I believe – I am led to believe to be effective should be in the vicinity of five to six rows of varying heights of trees and dense foliage. I have repeatedly requested for this vegetation screening, and at this point in time the proponents are allowing a mere one thickness row of vegetation in a five metre area. I have also repeatedly requested this vegetation screen be in a 50 metre area inside the proponent's legal boundary, which would only require the continuation of one already designed in the proponent's plans. Consequently, the need for more vegetation protection with this property being in the direct path of these daytime hot and gusty summer winds is absolutely essential.

20 The entrance to the proposed project has been planned adjacent to our western boundary, and the dust and pollution from the 45 plus heavy vehicles per day and 400 movements of light vehicles daily for 12 months with the prevailing weather currents will render our selectively chosen and sand pastures in the adjoining country to be absolutely useless for stock grazing. This entire traffic will also be passing my eastern and homestead boundary on the Olympic Highway and directly along our entire northern boundary, which is Benambra Road adjacent to our property, and then all along our western boundary is the project. In all, three of the four boundaries of our property will be impacted, and it is very surprising not one mention of some form of consideration or compensation or protection has been offered for the disruption to our business.

35 There has been mention of the construction company assisting with donations to communities, and what communities, may I ask. Are they the towns that are well away from the site and the area and not affected by the construction, unless it were for gaining from some extra sales of provisions and supplies. One would think the neighbours were the closest community. Is there to be any consideration or compensation given to those properties which are surrounded by, effected by and overlooking these massive constructions of unnatural materials in a rich fertile rural area. This property for one has not received any such offer. Thank you for your time.

MR HUTTON: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mrs Hoy, we appreciate you taking the time this morning. I'll now ask for speaker 11, Kim Lieschke, 15 – sorry, five minutes, representing D.E. Lieschke & Son Proprietary Limited. Good morning, Kim. Afternoon, Kim. Afternoon, Kim. We might – okay, we might move onto the
5 next speaker and we'll certainly give Mr Lieschke a chance to catch up. I move to speaker 12, Stephen Feuerherdt. Five minutes representing the Culcairn Southwest Rural Fire Brigade. Good afternoon, Stephen.

MR A. FEUERHERDT: Thank you. Yes. I'd just like to thank you for the
10 opportunity to speak. As a local landowner, farmer, I am also the captain of our local RFS brigade, Culcairn Southwest, which is part of this land – which is part of this land. Having been to many fires in the area, being grass, timber house, cars, machinery fires, how do you deal with solar development fires. You tell me. The sheer size of the proposed development is staggering, 900,000 solar panels, electrical
15 conduits, transformers and substations on 1500 acres. This development is in close proximity to towns and neighbouring landowners.

Discussions have been held as to the method of combatting a fire within this site and the risk to firefighters. A number of issues have been identified: (1) entrapment.
20 This site will be surrounded by six to eight foot high fence, chain mesh security fencing with locked gates and the rows of solar panels which create restricted manoeuvrability for firefighting vehicles, causing increased risk or injury to firefighters. (2) electrocution. This development is a large scale electricity generating site. Attempting to fight a fire within the site exposes the firefighters to
25 electrocution through residual current being held by the solar panels and by damaged electrical conduits and wiring, not to mention the many hundreds of inverters and transformers in use. The application of water to burning electrical infrastructure exposes firefighters to electrocution, serious injury or death.

30 (3) exposure. Burning solar panels, wiring, transformers, inverters and other associated electrical equipment will release toxic chemicals and smoke. Members of the rural RFS Brigade do not have breathing apparatus or training to combat these fires without firefighters being exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals. Fighting
35 a fire within these sites will likely cause significant respiratory effects and potentially ongoing health concerns. Fires within these sites are HAZMAT incidents; however, New South Wales Fire and Rescue have insufficient staff to combat large scale fires within these sites.

40 Most fires we fight on agricultural land can be access by gates or just cutting a fence to get to the fire, but how will this be achieved with many kilometres of security fence. In December 2009 we witnessed the catastrophic fire that went from Gerogery to Walla and destroyed many houses and farm land, and which ended up in a class action for the Greater Hume Shire Council. Last year we also witnessed the devastating fires in our shire which, unfortunately, claimed the life of a member of
45 the local brigade. This is why we will not be entering into a development to fight fires. We are only volunteers.

Fires do happen. How will they control the fuel load in exceptional years. The hairy panic which grows after summer rains, which when dries blows up against fences and builds up under panels, creating a risk. Why should landowners around these be put under extra stress worrying about a fire from their land destroying these
5 developments, which we cannot insure for. I ask you to consider all these when making your decision, as the company has had little or no – nothing in discussion on this development with us. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Stephen. Thank you very much. That's appreciated.
10 We're just going to jump back to speaker 11. Kim, are you online? Hello, Kim? Are you there, Kim? No, we appear not to have Kim online. We will certainly go back, given the opportunity, but just to move forward, we will now move to speaker number 13, which is Sharon Feuerherdt. Sharon has five minutes, and she's representing the Feuerherdt Pastoral Company. Thank you, Sharon.

15 MS S. FEUERHERDT: Thank you. You can hear me okay?

MR HUTTON: Yes, we can. Thank you.

20 MS S. FEUERHERDT: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm speaking, as I know the stress, anxiety, conflict and emotional turmoil created by the proposed solar developments in our shire and further afield. If these solar developments are approved, I feel that conflict and stress seen in other communities will only increase through construction and operation. It deposes aims of a renewal
25 energy action plan. We must see through the clever marketing and use proven research to draw out the true ramifications. Our family declined to be involved in a nearby solar development due to the many issues, with the main reason being the significant objection from the community.

30 The place for solar is on arid land. Government should push solar to renewable energy zones deemed to have these characteristics. I oppose these developments, as I know how agriculturally valuable land in our shire is in comparison to other areas of the State. Solar is not agriculture. I think largely agrivoltaics are a marketing strategy. Drought has brought suffering on Greater Hume's agriculture prospect.
35 This area has supported drought and fire affected areas providing feed and fodder. We have seen minimal pasture for the last two seasons, but cropping here has provided valuable feed source due to suitable rainfall. Once under panels, sowing will be unable to occur. The value of this land in Greater Hume is being underestimated.

40 Government Ministers responded to us that New South Wales would undertake important agricultural land mapping to protect agricultural land in our State, yet this lays dormant, stagnant and undetermined for over two years. While the agricultural – sorry, while the important agricultural land mapping lays dormant, the New South
45 Wales DPIE are aware old and incorrect soil mapping have caused problems, yet Planning is still using this soil mapping as a basis for assessment. Why, then, has DPIE made no comment in relation to this project. The application for this proposal

says the land is class 4 and class 6 under the old and incorrect land soil capability assessment scheme.

5 Our family has undertaken contract work on some of the land proposed for this
development. That land is productive and, in our view, is much better than the class
4 definition and too good for solar. The loss of just hay production on only part of
the land will cause a loss of hay contracting work with great value over the life of the
development. My view is the economic loss to agriculture over the long term of the
10 development is being underestimated, including post-farmgate. Why should
businesses like ours and that of Orange Grove be the collateral damage in exchange
for short-term construction benefits for other businesses. They market the retention
of agriculture through the grazing of sheep, but how will this occur if the class 6
land, defined as severe to very severe grazing limitations, if we want to use such
information.

15 It is not correct, and if climate change is to continue, where will the pasture come
from to feed these stock. I'm curious why some developers advise they do not graze
sheep for workplace, health and safety issues, and how can appropriate husbandry
take place with sheep under panels. Further research is required. Recommended
20 conditions advise that grazing is to be maintained where practicable. Who and what
determines if grazing is practicable. If not, how is agriculture retention guaranteed.
With out experience, we would question the ability to continue sheep production to a
level of 80 per cent and under panels and with the loss of the capacity to sow grazing
crops and undertake haymaking.

25 Why is legislation, policies and plans that promote the protection of agricultural land
being simply eclipsed by permissibility of the infrastructure set. One of the Greater
Humes LEP aims is to protect and retain agricultural – productive agricultural land.
At Greater Humes Shire RUIs own objective is to maintain the rural landscape
30 character of the land. They determine these objectives for a reason, and the land is
productive. Large scale solar is far from aesthetically pleasing and contradicts RUI
Zone objective. I've now visited many solar farms. All are ugly, industrial, daunting
and visually confronting and most of them had noticeable weed burden underneath
the panels. I have also viewed construction being extremely different to a peaceful
35 rural outlook. The only way to somewhat return the agricultural landscape is to
absolutely surround the development with many rows of trees on every single
boundary of the development.

40 The Clean Energy Council and Shepparton independent witness to the Victorian
Planning Panel, Ken Guthrie, also recommends that heat flow both by radiation and
convection can be substantially reduced by suitable screening with a buffer of dense
vegetation surrounding the solar farm that should be visually dense from the ground
to higher than the top of the PV array at its highest point. Tubestock trees are
45 problematic as they take many years to grow and will not meet any mitigation
measures for years to come. It puzzles me how the department could ensure
landscape screening minimises views within three years and believe clarity is

required to define the meaning of minimise views and what measure would be in place to determine what is acceptable.

5 The views of the infrastructure remained after three years what action could be applicable to negate the loss of visual amenity. The department's condition should say that trees should be visually dense prior to construction and operation to ensure mitigation meets its measure. I question how such and impact on the environment can supposedly save the environment. To me it appears hypocritical. All the products required to construct this development are mined from the ground. We
10 have amazing ecology in our area. Many species of wildlife, migratory birds and the nearby Gum Swamp. How will offsets and making payments actually overcome the true impact on our local environment and ecology. In regards to noise - - -

15 MR HUTTON: Sharon, we're almost out of time. Apologies. We're almost out of time. I just ask that you would just wrap up your presentation if that's okay, please. Just finish off your final remarks.

MS S. FEUERHERDT: Yes. It concerns me that there's little clarity about power – about whether power generated is actually required to meet the needs of supply.
20 Finally, I really believe that should any of these solar developments be approved, there will be further detrimental ramifications that we will see in the future, such as waste. Thank you for me – for my – for your time.

25 MR HUTTON: All right. Thank you, Sharon, for your time in preparing that presentation. We will just jump back to speaker 11 again to see whether Kim can hear us and is available to give his presentation.

MR LIESCHKE: Yes. I'm online.

30 MR HUTTON: G'day, Kim. Yes. Go ahead.

MR LIESCHKE: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, my name is Kim Lieschke and I would like to give you some quick history before, as I believe it is relevant to our future. I have lived in Walla Walla pretty much all my life. My wife
35 is Walla girl and we have four children. I work in our family car dealership, which started in 1923. Make no mistake, 97 years in the automotive history has seen some amazing changes. My granddad started with steam power, and now we have petrol diesel powered vehicles and, clearly, the world is looking towards electric vehicles. We also run eight school buses. The solar farm project has certainly created some
40 definite opinions in the community, all of which need to be considered, but also a decision has to be made to move forward. I can't speak on behalf of neighbouring farms, landholders, businesses located in the land near the proposed site, but I can understand their concerns. There is many things to consider.

45 I would like to speak from our perspective in Walla Walla community running a family business employing 13 full-time staff and 13 casual staff. Firstly, I am very passionate about our town and the community we are involved with every day.

Walla Walla as a town has bucked the normal trend of rural towns, slowing – slowly sliding backwards, but make no mistake there has some been – there has been some times where the going has been tough with droughts, fires and some leaner times, such as the COVID epidemic. We have this strong business sector with a lot of
5 employment opportunities, which is quite unique for a town of 700 people. To keep Walla moving forward we need to consider the future and the solar farm has been presented to us, and now we need to give it the consideration it deserves.

10 Global warming. Is it true or is it all made up. In my way of thinking, there is certainly some truth in what they say. We have to consider and act on a cleaner, more sustainable energy. So let's say there's some truth in what they are saying about climate change, and for the doubters say it's only 10 per cent factual, if I can give my children and their children a better, more sustainable life by looking and trying opportunities, such as this solar farm, I am all for it. It is really about trying to
15 make decisions to make life on this planet more sustainable for future generations.

On a side note, in the automotive industry, it is very clear that the trend is leaning towards electric vehicles. We believe this technology is going ahead in leaps and bounds to a point that our family business has invested in installing electric charging
20 space in the front of our premises and have done all the training necessary to sell the Nissan LEAF. So, yes, we believe electric cars are coming and how good would it be to be charging them using renewable energy. This in my view is a step in this very direction. This is certainly a long step from steam power my grandfather worked with back in 1923. If he wasn't open to change, we would still be working
25 on steam powered vehicles. I say this just to demonstrate we have to be open to change.

Secondly, and I do say secondly, I can see some real economic benefits for Walla. So, clearly, the solar companies voluntary contribution given to the Greater Hume
30 Shire would go a long way towards helping our community and will allow Walla Walla to further improve and increase services, allowing community projects to get off the ground with better financial support. This again will provide a better future for our town of Walla Walla and the generations of families to come, and with saying this, if the project was to go ahead there will be approximately 250 workers utilised
35 for this project. Great employment opportunities, and the flow on effects of having workers in our community will have a great economical flow on effect.

So in summary, with respect to all other parties and opinions, I fully support the project for the Walla Walla Solar Farm, and the opportunities it provides for Walla
40 Walla and, importantly, we will be taking a step in providing a more sustainable, cleaner form of generating electricity for generations to come. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you for your time, Mr Lieschke. That's appreciate.

45 MR LIESCHKE: No worries.

MR HUTTON: We're now going to move to speaker 18, which is Bianca Schultz. Bianca, you've got 10 minutes allocated.

5 MS SCHULTZ: Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Bianca Schultz. My husband, Cameron Schultz, and I own Kooringal or, as referenced to by FRV as R1a and R1b that is located directly adjacent to the northern boundary of the project. Cameron is a third generation local farmer with over 100 years farming in this area. We have four young children who are loving growing up on the land and learning all about farming from their father and their grandfather. Our farm has evolved, especially over the past decade, from the traditionally run family farm to a forever evolving and expanding farming operation. We farm on our home property and Kooringal. We also lease land, share farmland and run an increasing agricultural contracting business, which includes sowing hay and harvest and services.

15 We purchased Kooringal in 2016 after we'd been share farming the land for the prior four years. It increased our landholding and also secured our own property, which we never thought a solar project to be our neighbour. My husband has dedicated his whole life and career to farming. He has worked extremely hard to adapt, evolve and change his farming practices to build a successful farming and agricultural business. We purchased Kooringal as our – as an investment property that he has invested so much time and money into to improve the land and its productivity. We've been very successful in trying years in the area while much of the country has struggled through drought.

25 In 2016 we share farmed the portion of the land that is proposed for this solar project. We harvested wheat in 2016 which was declared a flood year in our area, and we still managed to harvest reasonable crops, and then in 2017 we had great yielding canola crops. We also completed contract silage bailing in 2018 for the landowner, who he on sold to a neighbour. From cropping – sorry, from sowing the crop, there is agricultural merchants, fertiliser merchants, transport agents, agronomist contractors, nine times out of 10 who are a neighbour or a friend, right through to harvesting, or for the livestock side of things, sheep or cattle, there is stock agents, transport companies, agricultural merchants, and the list goes on, who will all be impacted if this goes ahead. The belief that the land isn't productive for agriculture is absurd.

35 If any parcel of land is left unsprayed, then weeds such as hairy panic grow rapidly. If hairy panic is not sprayed prior to setting seed, it leaves behind a seed bank that takes approximately seven years to remove. This neighbour – this weed, like many, if not controlled will threaten neighbouring pastures and crops. We've also raised a concern regarding fire and insurance if there is a fire to start on a neighbour's property, i.e., from a header, where do we stand as our insurance policies will not cover a solar project. The response that we have received has been that the fire policies in place to protect the project, but have not assured us that neighbours will not lose our properties or livelihoods if the unthinkable happens. This has left a huge uncertainty for the neighbours, as it has been raised multiple times with the company with no direct response given.

The agriculture sector will be greatly impacted from this project if it is approved, not only financially, but within the community of mateship and neighbours. With the purchase of Koorungal we gained two homesteads that are on separate titles, which is extremely attractive for someone looking for a tree change. The key word being tree
5 in this sentence. One of the houses that is listed as R1 by FRV Australia is 78 metres from the boundary. With the setbacks of the vegetation screening proposed to 210 metres from the front of the house on the property we find it extremely frustrating that after multiple conversations and attempts at mitigation that we were misled by Cliona as to where the panels were to start.

10 We requested further setbacks due to a potential rental loss income and the potential resale value reduction. Orange Grove Gardens have a setback of 1.8 metres. R2 have a setback of 900 metres and we have 210 metres. Even within the presentation this morning from FRV, Cliona has spoken about the setbacks that they provided for
15 Orange Grove and R2 and the reasons behind their setbacks; however, as the closest, most visually impacted neighbour we have been provided with the most minimal setback and we cannot understand why.

20 There is no governing body to protect us as neighbours. There is no guidelines, laws or regulations surrounding solar projects. It is a disgrace that FRV believe that what they have done to be fair and adequate mitigation for us. The response in the assessment report states that:

25 *Department considers that the visual impact to R1 and R2 would not be significant due to topography, existing vegetation and additional setbacks and vegetation screening proposed by FRV.*

We have been told that the project will not impact or effect the value of our property; however, when we have asked anyone if they would live in the house that directly
30 overlooks the solar project the response is simply no. Land value in the current market with no improvements is at an all time high, with the possibility for further increase. If we attempt to sell the – if we attempt to sell after the solar project, there is no guarantee that the value will not directly be impacted. This property is situated
35 in an ideal location for anyone wanting to purchase a lifestyle block. The market has a high demand for country living away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

The market is looking for vast, wide open spaces with paddocks, trees, creeks and wildlife as far as the eye can see, not solar panels, which is the only thing that will be
40 on display outside the lounge room window for one of the houses on our property. There has been not one person from any department come and speak with us. There has been no contact from anyone responsible for putting the recommendations forward in support for this proposal to come to our property and have a look from our side of the fence. The cumulative impact with traffic, visual, noise and dust, the company have noted, that will be directly impacting us; however, we appear to be
45 left behind and brushed to the side with our concerns and what the company are willing to do for us.

I'd like you to take a minute and think about how would you feel if you were in our shoes. We are a young family trying to raise our children in the country, expanding our operation with smart business sense and purchasing a property that provides security to have a company come in and push us around and telling us what we want
5 and what is good for us. This project will take away something that we have worked so hard for for the past decade, and our farming legacy in the district for over 100 years. We are not against solar in any way, shape or form. We are opposed to the location that is proposed and extremely upset with the poor mitigation and treatment from a large company that have not listened to our concerns or to our requests.
10 There needs to be an alternative or mitigation that works for everyone that is affected. Thank you for listening to our concerns.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Bianca. I appreciate your time this morning. We're going to now go back to speaker 14, Lisa Mackay, who has five minutes.
15

MS MACKAY: Hello. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about the proposed solar farm at Walla Walla and why I support the many people on the list to speak today may be wondering who I am, and unless you have had or have a child attending the Walla Walla Primary School
20 within the last 10 years, you may not have heard of me. My name is Lisa Mackay and I am a resident of Albury. I grew up in Albury.

For the past 10 years, up until COVID became an issue in March of this year, I have been teaching piano and theory at the Walla Walla Primary School. I have had many
25 teaching gigs over the years, including Xavier High School, Eskdale and Talangatta Valley Schools. It was my former student, Danny Phegan, who approached me about 10 years ago and invited me to teach his children at his farmer and from there, along with the help of the Lieschke family and the school, that we built up a lovely little teaching practice, which has engaged many of the local families. Most weeks,
30 prior to COVID, I would make three trips into Walla to teach at the school and also afterhours during the non-school time at many of the home.

What I love about this town is the genuine kindness and acceptance and support that I have personally experienced during the past 10 years. So why am I in support of
35 the solar farm. There are so many reasons to support renewable clean energy, and I actually struggled to keep my list short, so for me on a purely personal level the influx of workers and their families to the area for the initial construction would be an increase, potentially, in my student base; however, this is not the only reason to support the proposed farm. During my years teaching in this area, I have witnessed
40 the closure of local businesses and I have observed the struggle to see shops stay open and I see local people travelling into Albury to obtain basic things that should be available in most small rural towns.

Over the years the school has come close to closing due to lack of new students and,
45 again, on a personal level, this would destroy my little practice. Should the school close, I simply wouldn't have the hours to teach individuals in their homes. More people and their families in the area would only boost existing businesses and

hopefully see some new ventures and businesses open up. I was, in all honesty, a little surprised to hear there was some opposition to the solar farm. I for one certainly would not begrudge a young family the chance to have financial security, and this is so relevant in these uncertain times.

5

I also believe that renewable energy will be the industry of the future and will employ many people in various capacities. Would it be such a bad thing if Walla was a place that took the lead in the transition to renewables. Why shouldn't this venture not other rural towns to do the same. I'm not an expert in this matter, and I don't claim to be, and again I'm only drawing on my personal experience and observations. My own family has seen direct benefits of having a solar system on our little house, and we've cut down our electricity bills, and we have a piece of mind knowing that our energy is clean and renewable. I've heard that some opposition to the farm is based on how the farm will look from neighbouring properties, and I understand that, but I'm just wondering if anyone has looked at the solar farm near the Albury landfill.

There are 4000 panels that are positioned quite low to the ground. The panels don't jut up into the skyline or impede the view. The output is 1.1 megawatts and they provide energy for around 1900 homes in the Albury area, feeding into the Hamilton Valley grid, as well as providing power – clean power to several businesses. I'm only surmising that the Walla Solar Farm would be of a similar setup, and I'm understanding that many companies will work with residents to make sure the panels fit into the landscape and environment. So I offer my full support to see this farm go ahead, and if some people here today view my position to comment as rather tenuous, given that I don't reside in Walla Walla, I will draw a fact – I would draw attention to the fact that I do have historical family ties.

My maternal grandfather was a Walla boy. You will find his name on the World War 2 memorial board in the townhall. Roy John Schmidt was born in 1917 in Culcairn Hospital and grew up in Walla with his parents and siblings in a house on Commercial Street. His name is the only name with a cross beside it, denoting that he lost his life in service of our country. At the end of the day we are discussing whether a solar panel should be built on someone's privately owned property, not an open cut coal mine or a field of huge wind turbines that would tower over the landscape, but a series of solar panels nestled into the land that would peacefully utilise one of Australia's most undervalued resources, our sunshine and long hours of daylight. We are talking about giving a family financial security and prosperity. Not only them, but to benefit many people in the area. We are talking about embracing change, good change, and these are things that many of our ancestors held dear. I know my family did when around 1915 they left Eberneeda and chose Walla as their place to live. Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk and thank you for listening.

45 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Lisa. Okay. We'll move on now to speaker 16, which is Christine Franklin. Christine has five minutes. Are you there, Christine?

MS FRANKLIN: Yes. Hello.

MR HUTTON: Hello.

5 MS FRANKLIN: So my interest in the Walla Walla proposal stems from having
been a community member and from the perspective of a health professional.
Although I'm not at this time living in the community, I was when it was first
proposed and I maintain strong family ties to the area and have a keen interest in
10 seeing the project established, as I may return with my family at some point in the
future. As a rural psychologist, I provide training, mentoring and clinical services to
people in many rural and remote communities across Australia. Although I cannot
speak for all health workers, I can comfortably contest that many hundreds of rural
health professionals and health organisations are united by our concerns about the
15 climate crisis and the impact that the rising rate of emissions is causing to the health
of Australians.

Public health is inextricably linked to climate health. We see this in the increased
frequency and intensity of bushfires, floods, dust storms, drought and other extreme
20 weather events. Consequently, in health facilities we are seeing higher rates of
respiratory illness, hospital admissions due to heat stress and, from my perspective,
increase mental health presentations. The Walla Walla Solar Farm project provides a
great opportunity to this community to do its bit to reduce dangerous emissions. The
burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and gas that drives global warming also
25 contributes to air pollution. This is a silent killer that's linked to the premature death
of 3000 Australians each year. Poor air quality is also linked to increasing illness
and death, to heart disease, lung cancer and asthma.

We also know that poor air quality can cause adverse outcomes in pregnancy,
including low birth rate, low birth weight and stillbirth. It's estimated that the annual
30 cost from air pollution mortality alone is somewhere between 11.1 and 24.3 billion
dollars. Climate change also threatens the health and wellbeing of the population
through an increased prevalence of food and water and vector-borne pathogens,
reduced availability of food and fresh water, sea level rise, loss of biodiversity and
loss of inhabitable land. These factors then contribute to an increased risk of
35 infectious diseases, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, asthma allergies,
mental illness, psychosocial impacts, violence, poor nutrition, injury, poisoning and
mortality.

As a result, healthcare services are adversely affected, often impacting more severely
40 those of us living in rural areas who may already have increased risk of ill health
because of limited access to services. I understand that much of the opposition to
this proposal is to do with the visual impact of solar panels. I have personally
attended a family wedding at Orange Grove Gardens. It's a beautiful location and
the facility did a wonderful job of managing the event. I cannot be convinced that
45 the existence of a solar farm on a neighbouring property will detract from the lovely
experience Orange Grove offers. I've worked across much of Australia and I have

viewed many other electricity generating enterprises. I much prefer the idea of some solar panels over my back fence than an ugly open cut coal mine.

5 The current Federal Government predictions show that Australia will not achieve its current emissions reduction targets of 26 to 28 per cent below 2005 levels without further action. I believe everyone needs to play a part in holding atmospheric warming to below two degrees, and I view the Walla Walla project as a brilliant community opportunity for us to take meaningful action to reduce commissions, as well as contribute to 300 megawatts of renewable energy to the national electricity market. From a health professional's perspective, I feel compelled to highlight that human health, economic health and environmental health are so closely connected that they must be considered when contemplating the Walla Walla proposal. It's 10 universally accepted that climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century and that the current Australian carbon reduction commitments are nowhere 15 near enough to protect our children and future generations from the wide-ranging health risks. The sooner we act the better our chances of success. Thank you for letting me speak today.

20 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Christine, it's appreciated. We'll now move onto speaker 15, Tamara McLean. Are you there, Tamara?

MS McLEAN: Yes, I am. Good afternoon.

25 MR HUTTON: Good afternoon.

MS McLEAN: In the interest of transparency I would like to declare the owner of the majority of the land for the proposed solar farm is my brother; however, I have no direct connection to the project, nor will I receive any financial gain from the project, so the validity of my opinion should not be diminished by this fact. As a 30 mother and citizen of the world I have grave concerns for the health of our planet. It is up to our generation, who have the knowledge, ability and technology to implement change to renewable energy sources to fight against climate change and the depletion of our natural non-renewable resources.

35 For our area, the implementation of solar farming is the obvious choice to achieve this. We are a sun drenched location and our failure to harvest solar energy on a large scale has been a daily waste of this natural resource. Unlike the current practices of mining our land, fracking our farms and drilling into our seabeds for non-renewable resources, harvesting solar energy has no negative impact on our 40 earth or the sun itself. It is simply an abundant, continuous resource that has been grossly underutilised.

45 The argument against the loss of prime agricultural land is, in my opinion, a redundant one. The proposed site on the property is not prime land. It is low lying and marginal, but in any event, will still allow for safe sheep grazing as is the current practice. In addition to that, the infrastructure is removal at the expiry of the 30 year lease term. Notwithstanding the bumper season are enjoying this year,

diversification of land use and farming practices must be allowed in order for our farmers to insulate themselves against financial loss during times of drought and failed crops and pastures.

5 I note there is already a precedent of land use diversification in the area, with
neighbouring property Orange Grove running a commercial wedding and
accommodation venue from their farming property. The project will also be a cash
injection for the local community through the creation of both temporary and long-
term employment opportunities. I will close by reiterating my earlier words. Our
10 generation has the knowledge, ability and technology to implement sustainable
change. We therefore have an obligation to our future generations to act against
climate change and the depletion of our natural resources through investment in
renewable energy. Thank you.

15 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Tamara. We will move onto speaker 17, which is Tim
Hawkins. Tim has five minutes. One moment, we're just getting Tim online now.
Yes. So just to confirm, we're going to go to speaker 17, which is Tim Hawkins.
Tim has five minutes. Are you there, Tim?

20 MR HAWKINS: Yes. How you going.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Good afternoon. Thank you.

25 MR HAWKINS: Yes. Tim Hawkins. As you know, we're a local earthmoving
business in the area that support the project, because of the work it's going to bring
the community and, you know, well, just it's going to be good for the local
community and jobs and good for the – good energy, clean energy for the world and,
yes, that's about it, really. It's just a matter of that.

30 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Tim. I appreciate your comments. Thank you.

MR HAWKINS: No worries.

35 MR HUTTON: Yes. So the next speaker is 19, James Clancy. We're just getting
phone contact with James. Just one moment. So we'll just go – so we're just
reiterating, it's speaker 19, James Clancy, five minutes allowed. Are you there,
James?

40 MR CLANCY: Yes. Yes. How's it going.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Good afternoon.

MR CLANCY: Do you want me to get straight into it?

45 MR HUTTON: Yes, please.

MR CLANCY: Right. As a bit of a disclaimer, I'm Caroline's brother and Danny's brother-in-law. I'm also a fourth generation farmer whose views in support of the solar farm. I've a pretty good understanding of the country. We've been share farming Carol and Danny's original farm since 2006. This neighbours, where the solar farm's going to go, we were offered the share farming on the block where the solar farm was about 10 years ago when they purchased that. We were originally interested in doing it, even though it is low, wet country, but we had the thought that we would be able to drain it into the creek running through the middle of it. The issue was once we surveyed the country we found there were too many wet hollows that were too far away from the creek and it just became unviable to go down that draining path. We would have had to move too much dirt to make it – to take the risk away of the wet country, so that's probably – yes. The country is more suited to grazing than it is to farming.

I can understand why some of the neighbours are not in favour of this, but I think if it's done properly and shelterbelts are put up around the sides that they see that helps to, sort of, mitigate the effect that this proposal has. I think having a flat a flat block of solar farms is better than having rising country where tree lines aren't going to be able to hide them. I think renewables are the future of energy production, and to have large amounts of money coming into small communities, having investors who are doing that also creates employment opportunities and, yes, increases the disposable income of the area and the flow-on effects of this creates – any outside money coming into a small community is a positive. It sort of diversifies the reliance of that community away from just primary production and to other areas that don't have a reliance on rainfall to keep the money flowing, and that's pretty much it.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, James. Appreciate that.

MR CLANCY: No worries. Thanks for your time.

MR HUTTON: Cheers. I'm going to move now to speaker 20, Danny Phegan. I've just got to establish a phone contact with Danny. Okay. Just confirming, speaker 20, Danny Phegan. Danny you've got 10 minutes. Are you there, Danny?

MR PHEGAN: Yes. I'm there. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Yes. All yours. Thank you.

MR PHEGAN: Thank you. G'day, committee, I'm the land – or a landowner for the project so, of course, I support it and agree to the assessment and recommendation for its approval. This is the first time I've spoken publicly about the development. I've had faith in the project and patience with the process, but I have to say after listening today and the time that's gone under bridge since then, it's still quite frustrating to still be entertaining this loss of prime agricultural land argument. There's been so much speculation on what type of land our farm is, how productive it is, the agricultural output, perceived agricultural loss, etcetera, etcetera. For me it's such a flawed argument. Firstly, with respect, everybody, it's my farm

and I'm under no obligation to meet any output targets. I could fill it with horses or turn it into a wildlife sanctuary, I suppose, if I wanted to, and there was certainly no perceived community ownership when we were paying 26,000 a month interest back in the day.

5

My farm's output should be entirely my own business, the same as anyone else's farm is theirs, and the fact is the land has been appropriately zoned for solar development. It's been rated four to six under the land and soil capability mapping in 2017, and I know there's some that are making waves to call into doubt the integrity of that rating system, but the practical realities regarding the management of this land would compliment that rating. It's low lying marginal country with frost risks for crops. It's susceptible to staying wet too long through winter, and it's also interesting to note this country was on the market for two and a half years. It went through two failed public auction campaigns without a single bid prior to us buying it and adding it to the rest of our landholding out here, and we paid an average of \$1420 an acre. Back then the going rate was about two and a half thousand dollars an acre. So that was how it's considered in the district.

20 So it's an interesting argument. It's always been better suited to grazing. Currently there's 15 per cent of it under crop, which is 81 hectares, and I note the assessment refers to 24 per cent. I'm not sure where that figure came from. Maybe it was the subsequent one kilometre pushback from Orange Grove Gardens, but there's 81 hectares cropped at the moment, and considering a 510 hectare total contribution, so the math to me, what's that, a bit over 15 per cent. Of course, the IPC inspected our farm late last week and even objectors couldn't deny it's been an outstanding season. I was just listening to the country report on the ABC a moment ago. In any given year, this is always the best time to inspect a farm, of course, but this year is certainly a standout season amongst all others.

30 They're describing it as the best in a generation, so – I made the comment to the IPC, though, that my country is exactly the same country as across the road. It's only separated by 30 metres of dirt road, and where we've gone to the trouble of spraying weeds and the expense of putting inputs in our land, we reap the benefits of a great season like this and, of course, you know, there's no hiding the fact there's pasture to your – to past your knee and it looks glorious. It'll look a bit different probably four or five weeks, but it looks glorious. We're in the middle of spring, and I noted the IPC, the other side of the road which is only separated by only 30 metres has, you know, Paterson's Curse, a noxious weed, to your ankle height and I'm sure no one would argue that is prime land, but I just feel like we're kind of being penalised for our own work, and notwithstanding that, the season's not over yet, too. We've still got to get these crops off, so there's been misadventure in the past at the eleventh hour.

45 The land stays too wet for too long, as it does for cropping, and even with the benefit of hindsight we wouldn't have cropped any more up this season. It's limitations have always been better suited to grazing, as has historically shown, long before any talk of solar farms, and I believe it's perfectly suited for dual use agrisolar. It's a

curious thing that – to me, that objectors want to describe this land as prime when Orange Grove Gardens themselves rely on a secondary income stream, such as a wedding reception venue and a coffee van, and receptor R2 has a job as groundskeeper at the local public school. The land simply isn't prime, and I'm a part-time musician to supplement our income. The land simply isn't prime. The argument is defunct. In my opinion, it's right up there with solar panels kill cows and raises the temperature six degrees and the reflection of them will bring airplanes down. To me it's just a defunct argument. So I ask the panel, could you please put image number 1 up on the screen, and if you could confirm with me that's on, because I've got no way to see it at the moment.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Danny, we can confirm we can see that image. Four photos.

MR PHEGAN: Thank you. There's – the image I'm referring to just now is the yellow image with the wedding couple there. I'll just go back a moment. I appreciate that my three closest receptors got to have a say in all this. Totally understand that, and that's why I spoke to the three of them prior to signing with a solar company. R2 has a home a kilometre from the substation, R1 has a rental property, which is currently tenanted by mutual friends who, incidentally, moved in during the DA process and they're fully aware of the proposed development. They've made no objection, and R5, of course, runs a wedding reception venue in the distance.

At that time all three receptors said they wouldn't object to the project, so on good faith we signed and now – I guess now we arrive at this point after all this time, the passage of time, and I might just make the comment, too, without trying to infuriate anybody, I am aware that one of those receptors tried to add land to the project, and maybe their discontent is the subject of their own failed negotiations, I don't know, but even further abroad nearly all objectors have stated that if they had that opportunity, they'd do it as well. In the case of Orange Grove, I spoke to a proprietor of that farm who told me, to the best of my recollection, this is how the conversation went. He said, "I spoke to dad and there's only 200 metres where there aren't already trees, and if your company can plant tree lines along that board, then we don't have a problem", and my response was, "If the company won't do it, I will".

Now, I've got correspondence supporting that claim, which I've already sent to the State Government, and some months later after several other cordial exchanges we received this flyer, which I'll refer to the image 1 now. It was a complete blindside to us. We were shocked. We received this flyer in the mail, which saturated the district, and that was the first time we were aware there was any discontent whatsoever, and soon after we received that flyer we – I received a call from R1 and R2, who were good enough, out of respect, to make contact with me and explain that Orange Grove were leading a charge against the solar farm, and they were going to join the move against it after that I actually made the comment - - -

MR HUTTON: Danny.

MR PHEGAN: Sorry?

MR HUTTON: Danny, if I could just – I understand your conversation here. What we're most interested in is understanding, I guess - - -

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MR PHEGAN: I'll move on.

MR HUTTON: - - - your key issues or attributes that you want to explain to the commission. We do understand - - -

10

MR PHEGAN: Sure. Okay. I'll move on. I'll move on, but just with the point that I thought that first image was a deliberate attempt to mislead the public and it gained traction with objectors. We estimate that the solar panels would have to be 40 or 50 metres high to breach the tree canopy there. If we now refer to the second image, that is the actual before and after superimposed image that was in the EIS prior to a 50 metre tree screening.

15

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR PHEGAN: And prior to the subsequent one kilometre pushback. I'll just make the comment, I believe that FRV have gone to enormous lengths to mitigate all receivers concerns, particularly that of Orange Grove, and I take your point. I'll move on now. I won't dwell on that.

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MR HUTTON: Yes. We'll say we've seen this site and we've seen these images, so we do appreciate if you could just move onto the next - - -

25

MR PHEGAN: Sure.

MR HUTTON: - - - point. Thank you, Danny.

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MR PHEGAN: Sure. Okay. Look, I'll just – I'll make the observation that in our 15 years in this town we've seen the demise of the grocery shop, the hardware store, the Billabong Café, the news agency. The pub still ticks along, but it could use support, and in recent years the little schools have been at risk of losing a third teacher and, of course, a couple of nearly at risk of closing and this year we lost a Holden dealership. It's not all doom and gloom. Andrew Kotzur, who is speaking in favour of the project a little bit later in the day employs 100 people from the district, but, you know, I hate to think where we'd, sort of, be at without a business like that in town.

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We – I'm sure our town could use the economic stimulation and the benefits from this proposed development, and on a slightly different note, with the government assistance still at hand, we haven't still yet seen the full economic fallout of COVID-19. I just think for everybody's sake we need to embrace this opportunity. I think it will be viewed as an opportunity lost if we don't, and as Cliona Gormley stated this morning, you know, there's no planet B, which I thought was a great statement. I'm

45

wrapping up now. I can tell the committee that so far 100 per cent of my option fees have been reinjected back into our local community in agistment inputs for underperforming country on the other side of the farm, which we're going to retain for traditional agriculture, and this has increased cropping on our other side by 101
5 hectares, which, of course, cancels out the 81 hectares, which is going to be under zoned as pasture in the solar area, and also in large it's being used to sign up for a new shearing shed, which has been sourced by PJN Steel from Walla Walla.

10 So the solar farm is already paying dividends locally just with the option fees that have been paid and, of course, the project will dwarf anything that we've been paid in option fees so far, and I maintain that sheep can satisfactorily graze under and around the panels, and I think people forget these panels are spread some eight metres plus apart, the rows of them, and I don't understand how negative speculation can gain traction in this regard when there are already numerous precedences for
15 agriculture and solar coexisting, such as Lillydale – Lilyvale in Queensland, Parkes, Moree, Dubbo, the list goes on, and, look, finally we live in the growth corridor of our greatest inland city.

20 You can't enjoy the enormous capital of your land asset without also embracing some development that comes with it. Right now I could subdivide my land, and Orange Grove won't always have the luxury of an unimpeded view of my land to be able to take photos of it. In closing, Carolyn and I have six kids. We love our farm. Worked hard to be here. We didn't take the decision lightly, we went and got educated, we researched the issue and we're very proud to be associated with FRV in
25 this project, particularly with all the green areas that are being retained, not only for the future of our own kids, but for the future of all kids. As David Attenborough says in his recent mission statement renewables are the only way forward and the sun generates enough energy to power the Earth 20 times over every day, we've just got to harness it. I just think it'd be a shame for our area to miss out on something that
30 would benefit so many for the objection of so few, and that's all I've got to say. I'll leave that with you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Danny, appreciate your time today to come and speak with the commission. The last speaker before lunch break will be Ron Wilson. Ron,
35 speaker 21, and Ron has five minutes. Ron represents the Gregory – sorry, the Gerogery, sorry, wrong pronunciation, Horse Sports Club. If you could speak, Ron, please. We're just establishing contact with Ron now.

40 MR WILSON: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Good afternoon, Ron.

MR WILSON: Good afternoon.

45 MR HUTTON: Yes. Good afternoon. You're speaking, so ready to go.

MR WILSON: Okay. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Ron. Cheers.

MR WILSON: Yes. Hello, I'm – please get this straight, I'm not speaking on support of the Phegan family. I'm here to support the solar farm. I think it's a great
5 asset to the area. I think it'll support the commercial sector, as well as sporting. I'm
president of the Gerogery Horse Sports, which we donate money to the fire brigade,
to the school, etcetera, I think – with the workers, etcetera, I think we may have a bit
10 of a spinoff there, which is great. As for the location, well, I believe that a bigger
portion of the project will be built on swampland, which isn't so much productive
land. I believe that it can be still grazed by sheep at a certain time of the year, which
is great. Our alternatives, I feel, we have coal fired – well, we have the greenhouse
emissions there, which is a problem, of course, especially for today's environment.

Do we go to hydro. We're losing loss of productive grounds as far as river flats,
15 etcetera, loss of flora and fauna. Windfarms. I don't know a great deal about that. I
do believe that they give off a radiation or there's something not quite right with that,
which leaves us with the solar thing, which is clean and green. I don't – I can't see a
problem with that at all. The site will be built – will be flanked by two gravel roads,
20 so there's not a great deal of traffic through there. I travel through that way at
different times and I've – very rarely do I run into any people.

So I can't see there'd be a problem. Apparently, there's a – there is one residence
that will be looking over that site, but I believe that they're going to landscape that
and put some trees, etcetera, through, so that'll – that shouldn't be a problem to the
25 residents. What else can I say. Earlier in the year we went on a family holiday over
to the coast. We went through Canberra and they have a solar farm over there.
Really caught my eye, because I'd never seen one. A week later coming home, I
glanced over my shoulder, "Oh, okay, there's a solar farm. Beauty", and kept
driving. I didn't have any problems with it and I can't see why there'd be problems
30 with other people, you know. It's – we're running out of power at a great rate of
knots. We've got to do something and I think that this solar plant will be just the
thing. Again, clean and green. That's about all I have to say, I guess, if you need
any more, well, please say.

35 MR HUTTON: No. Thank you, Ron. We appreciate your time. All right. We're
running a little bit ahead of schedule, but we will now have a lunchbreak. Our
intention is to reconvene at 2.45 for after lunch. So we thank you all for your time.
We'll see you again at 2.45.

40

ADJOURNED

[1.18 pm]

45 **RESUMED**

[2.44 pm]

MR HUTTON: Welcome back to after the lunch adjournment on the Walla Walla Solar Project public meeting. I'd now like to ask speaker 22, Jennifer Jacob, to speak. Five minutes, Jennifer. Hello.

5 MS JACOB: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you very much.

10 MS JACOB: All right. Thank you, Commissioners. I am part of a three
generational farming family close to Walla Walla. I strongly object to large scale
solar on prime agricultural land. The key point is that the Walla Walla Solar Project
should not be on prime agricultural land. How can the department recommend this
project when it's based on false land classification. In an open community
15 information session I went to for the Walla Solar Farm, a person from the company
came up to me and said, "We should not be here. We were given the wrong land
classification".

20 Many concerned people in our area sent detailed submissions to the DPIE nearly two
years ago of why the present land mapping is incorrect. The findings of the land
mapping project are to be released this month. Council has been advised that this
land will be mapped as important agricultural land so it can be constrained under the
department's large scale energy guidelines. The council looked at the land and said
it is high agricultural land. The department and the solar companies proposing the
25 Walla, Culcairn and Jindera Solar Farms all says because the mapping isn't finalised
it's not directly relevant to the assessment of the Walla Walla Solar Project, so
they're just going ahead using incorrect figures, and that is not right. My second
point of great concern is that if a State significant solar project is approved it opens
the door to solar projects under \$30 million.

30 A man was door knocking at local farms in late June looking for land to lease. If the
council don't give him approval, he can take it to court where a judge can approve it
as it's already near an improved – an approved SSD solar project. This has already
happened at Bomen near Wagga Wagga. My third point relates to what FRV have
said about Walla Walla in its response to submissions:

35

*The local economy has experienced setbacks recently. A number of retail
businesses have closed or reduced their trading hours, and the local primary
school struggles to retain sufficient pupil numbers.*

40 And they also said a prominent local business would close in June this year:

*The solar proposal will provide a much needed injection into the town's
economy.*

45 Untrue. The only place that closed was the Walla Café, and that wasn't because –
that was their choice. Walla is unique that for a town our size we have many
longstanding businesses all doing well because of agriculture. In addition, St Paul's

College, Walla Walla Public School, new child care centre, the WAW Bank, the old bakery. A man has just come in over the last 12 months, renovated it, now it has three new businesses in it. A new electrical business in a new shed have just had – was operating well. The coffee shop under new management, the housing estate, the
5 chemist, the doctor, the houses are bought quickly here. Hairdresser. They're all doing well because of agriculture. All doing well without solar.

My fourth point isn't mentioned by the department, but it's just appalling how
10 landholders and neighbours have been treated by FRV in this project, and also the deep divisions in our community are shocking. We have never, ever experienced this before. In closing, I'm very disappointed that such an important proposal as this, especially with three others proposed in our shire, is virtual. By being face-to-face
15 more people can be involved, and you get a true understanding. I urge you to wait for the DPIE findings to come out so the correct land classification is used.

More thought and planning needs to be given to where large scale solar is put, and
20 also just my last comment. There's now so much new energy in place, I read, the renewable energy target will be greatly oversupplied by the year 2022. New South Wales and Victoria will likely follow Queensland's footsteps of a renewable energy investment collapse in a year or so. So time to pause. Time to review and let's build
25 on what we have that's been successful for – and trusted for 150 years.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Jennifer. Thank you for your comments today. We'll
30 move now to speaker 23, Rayne LeBusque. Are you there Rayne?

MR LeBUSQUE: Yes. Hi. Yes, I am, thank you.

MR HUTTON: Hello. You're away.

MR LeBUSQUE: Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today.
35 I've sat back and listen to what I believe to be in my view the minority of our community criticising the solar farm and thought I really shouldn't remain a part of a silent majority any longer. I think Walla needs to be supportive of this and, you know, I don't want to sit back and not rock the boat. I think it's time to actually stand up and say what I believe in.

I went to the community session at Walla Walla. I found it very informative. I
40 listened to what they had to say and didn't hear a lot that had me scared. I think it stands to be great for the local economy. In my view it supports my ethical beliefs and values, as well, around environmental concerns. My wife has a degree in environmental science with first class honours, and she's worked – she still works in that field, so I reckon I've got a fair insight into environmental issue and climactic change on a global scale and also around our local community.

45 I've been surprised by the small local resistance, but for the large part it appears in my view to be a bit illogical. If I take emotion out of it and only look at the logical arguments that I can see, and that is aesthetics, but from what I heard at the

community meeting and what I've read, it appears that the company that is trying to put this project up is doing everything they can to alleviate that, putting in green corridors and that sort of thing so, to me, that not only ticks off on the aesthetic issue, but it actually helps with some of the environmental issues that exist in the area, and creating those green corridors.

If we don't move forward as a society, we'll only be moving backwards, that's my view and it's backed up by what I heard from David Attenborough in his documentary. It just reinforced everything to me that we need to be going to renewable energies, and this solar project is, obviously, a big kick in that direction. Summing up, it would be very disappointing to see this big opportunity for our community and our local environment to be missed out on. I just think it's going to help us all. So thank you for the opportunity to speak. I really appreciate it.

One more thing just before I go, I heard the previous people talking about prime agricultural land. In my view the farmer can do whatever he wants with his land. If a farmer chooses to grow nothing but chickpeas, no one would say boo about it. If he decided to plant that out as just timber, no one would say anything about it, so I'm a bit bemused by how we can suddenly sit back and go, "That's prime agricultural land", but thank you for your time and thank you for listening to me.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Rayne. Appreciate your contribution today. Move on to speaker 24, Greg Vonthien. Hello, Greg.

MR VONTHIEN: Hello.

MR HUTTON: Hi. You are - - -

MR VONTHIEN: Greg Vonthien's my name. I'm a retired farmer, fourth generation. I farmed about 50 ks west of here for all my life. I've got a bit of an engineering background. Now, I've examined the site in detail. It is not top farming land but any stretch of the imagination. It's quite wet normally, and I can't think of a better solution than putting solar panels on it. The world is screaming out for solar panels which, incidentally, Australia invented at the New South Wales University, a professor there ever and will end up powering the world and saving us from climate change, I hope.

And the International Energy Agency have called on all countries to consider renewable energy, and particularly solar, being the cheapest power form possible, and if solar is put in the outback, the infrastructure to connect it to the grid is quite destructive to the environment, because it has to be cleared 60 metres each side of the power line for a start, so that's a massive loss of vegetation and trees, and will, my research indicates, increase the price of power by about 30 per cent. So that makes it illogical, and this site is right next to the infrastructure, a very commonsense place to put it.

I don't think there can be enough solar. It's – it doesn't make any noise, people will get used to looking at them, and I'm quite happy to live right next to them. In fact, I suggested to Greater Hume Shire Council about two years ago that they consider powering Culcairn by putting them on the common, which is right opposite my
5 house, which is normally a massive fire hazard, anyway, which it is now, but if it had solar panels and properly grazed, it could power the town, much like Lockhart is planning to do and provide cheaper power for the town and attract businesses.

I'm quite impressed with FRVs bending over backwards to try and keep everyone
10 happy, and the DPIE assessment I was very impressed with. They've gone to a lot of trouble to soften the blow of putting such a structure there, but otherwise the site's not in full view of very many people at all, and might I say from the wedding reception are that they promote it, because anyone who's getting married probably is – intends to have children and that's what's going to protect that generation.

15 If we do nothing, I fear for the next generation, because we're on a track to nowhere at the moment, and Greg Mullins at the bushfire royal commission has said we have to stop as soon as possible burning coal, oil and gas to save the planet, and he's an experienced firefighter and he said the fires are becoming almost uncontrollable now
20 with the warmer temperatures, and last year was the hottest year on record, and I'm fully in favour of this particular setup and the others in – that are proposed.

I think it's brilliant and the next generation will one day thank us for doing that. I don't see any loss of agricultural land at all, because of the fact you can run sheep
25 under them. That's food and fibre. I think it's all plus, and that's about all I've got to say, really. The NFF, the National Farmers Federation, have come out and want to support carbon free by 2050. Unfortunately, our Federal Government hasn't committed to that, so I think the very fact that the National Farmers are supportive of such things speaks high for solar. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

30 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Vonthien. Appreciate your speaking with us this afternoon. Thank you. We'll now move onto the next speaker, number 25 on the list, Mark Torrens. Mark's been allocated five minutes. Hello, Mark.

35 MR TORRENS: Yes. G'Day. Thank you for having me.

MR HUTTON: Good afternoon.

40 MR TORRENS: I'll jump straight into it, I know you guys are pressed for time. I'm an adult. I live in Walla Walla. I also work in manufacturing for Mars Petcare. Some of you may or may not know Mars just invested in a solar farm out at Noonan in Victoria. I've had a lot to do with that one, so I speak from a person – from a position where I'm a neighbour in the area of Walla and also in the manufacturing industry where we rely on solar.

45 It's pretty obvious in the recent years that the rise in electricity prices have accelerated, volatility is the new norm. I see coming out of this volatility is the

opportunity to really embrace that, working in manufacturing, and all of us at the end of the day, we can see our own energy bills and see the impact. Having solar onboard is definitely the right way to go from a renewable point of view, it'll help with our volatility in pricing and, really, get us much closer to our greenhouse gas commitments across the country.

You know, what I like about the project here, it's in New South Wales. I live in New South Wales. I work in Victoria, but this is good for the town of Walla. It's good for New South Wales. It's getting New South Wales to play catch up with some of the solar developments that Victoria has done. I see it as a good way of managing the transportation cost, processing cost and, really, trying to smooth out the volatility we're seeing in the markets and doing the right thing for the environment for the time to come.

Hearing the speaker beforehand, his tail part. Completely agree with his view on what it means for the generations to come. I can't see how it's going to adversely effect living in this area. Part of my role with Mars is also buying all our commodities and grains, so I know firsthand what the market's like for grain prices and the impacts we see. Having another resource to put more energy back into the system that will allow us to reduce and smooth out volatility is a big plus, and it will only help the farming community.

So I don't quite see where all the noise keeps coming about the food bowl. Knowing that area and living close to that area, I don't – it's marginal, at best, and I don't see that as an impact. I think it's – from a community point of view I think this is the time for Walla to pioneer and get on the front foot with renewable. It's a great opportunity for the town.

It's a great opportunity to be on the front foot and do the right thing and, moving forward, you know, growing up in the country, as Dorothea Mackellar said, Australia's a sunburnt country. Let's embrace it and get on the front foot and let the town of Walla grow. Mine's very short and sweet. I know you guys are pushed for time, like we all are, so I thank you and I really look forward to this development going ahead.

MR HUTTON: No. Thank you for your time, Mark, it's appreciated. Okay. We'll jump down, then, to speaker 26, which is Anne Feuerherdt. Hello, Anne.

MS A. FEUERHERDT: Hi.

MR HUTTON: Hi, how are you. You're welcome to commence.

MS A. FEUERHERDT: I'm good, thank you. Thanks for listening to me. I am just a fair dinkum farmer. I'm not a public speaker, so I have not prepared a big presentation for you guys. I'm just here to let you know what it's been like for me to live on a farm. I grew up in Walla Walla on a farm. I have four siblings. We all grew up on the farm. It was, obviously, good enough that we could live off it. Then

I got married and I came to live on this farm at Culcairn, which is next to where the solar panels are going in, and the same thing has happened. So I am very well aware of what farmers do, and I do not believe that what has been put forward is what farmers are about. Farmers are wanting to look after their environment. They are
5 not there to disturb the environment or upset it at all. I had a family. I brought up my children here. We have four children, and my husband is here now and he is one of five children, who are all – grew up on this area and to say that it is not good farming land is just ridiculous.

10 It is good farming land, because we've all grown up, we've all been educated through this farm, we have tried our best to keep local businesses going through agriculture and I'm just – we are – as farmers, we understand that we are on the way out, but we are tired of people in the city telling us what to do when they don't understand what it is that we do do, and I haven't probably got any more to say, other
15 than that – electricity. People keep mentioning about the electricity, but we won't benefit from anything about the electricity. It'll all go to the city. We don't – and we were just told that we – I asked a question, "What do we get out of this?" and all I was told was, "You can feel good about helping the country". Well, we are losing our lifestyle here. My family – I am Adrian's mum, who talked earlier, he has three
20 boys.

We all want to keep living on the farm, but the way things are going, we have a few years left, we can't survive with a solar farm right next door to us. It's just – we wanted to live on our – sell the farm and be self-sufficient, but that's not going to
25 happen now, because our land is devalued. Thank you for listening to me. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: No. Thank you, Anne. I understand Desmond is there with you. So, Desmond, you're - - -
30

MR D.J. FEUERHERDT: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Yes. hello. You're speaker 28. What we'll do is we'll take the opportunity to speak with you now. You've got five minutes - - -
35

MR D.J. FEUERHERDT: Okay. That's fine.

MR HUTTON: So, thank you, Desmond.

40 MR D.J. FEUERHERDT: Yes. My name's Des James Feuerhardt. I live here at Springfield and used to own Orange Grove. Orange Grove used to be mine, and with concession planning now my son owns it and his wife, Trish, and they've got three boys who all love farming. Now, I can't understand why with concession planning, Trish started her business several years ago, Orange Grove Gardens, for an income,
45 because when she married my son she'd come out of that sort of industry, and that's the only reason she started that up. The gardens are beautiful, and when I bought the place, they wanted to do something with it.

So that's how she come about – and she borrowed all the money to do it herself, and so I wish Danny would get his figures right, and also on that, Shay, my nephew, who lives at Mountain View, who was approached for solar farm declined the offer, because it wasn't right. He's got a son that loves farming, as well, and I just can't
5 understand why they want this prime agricultural country. I started off with 1500 acres. I'm now responsible for 9000, and we've grown that way, so you can't tell me it's not prime agricultural country.

10 Now, with the birds. I'm a bird lover. I like to watch birds and I've seen Corellas and Cockatoos. If they're thinking they're only going to put up 120 nest boxes for these Corellas and birds like that, they'd want to have a rethink and put more like five or six hundred, because I've seen mobs of cockatoos of 500 or so, and they'll start chewing on panels and things like that. They're very destructive. And the other
15 side of it, too, these trees that they're going to push over, some of them are 400 years old, if not older, and they're allowed to do it. If I go out and clear a portion of my property for cropping, I would probably be fined and cop a big fine. So double standards doesn't agree with me, and as you can probably see, I'm speaking from the heart instead of my lips, and I think it should not go ahead.

20 I'm definitely against it, and the other thing was the water, erosion and things like that, which will occur. I'm eighty – I'm 63. I've lived in this house since I was two, and I've lived in this house all my life, and I just can't accept change. I know it's hard, but why doesn't everyone – why doesn't the government make it compulsory that everyone building a new house put solar on their house with a battery beside it,
25 and that'll solve all this issue, and I – you know, like, it's all about money, really, and people that are a bit greedy.

These guys that are going to have the solar on their property, one's a solicitor, another one is a real estate agent. They didn't make their money out of farming and they will not make their money out of farming, because they don't know how to
30 farm, and this is the reason I'm against it, as well, because the island – heat island will have an effect. Now, my nephew, Shay, who wasn't applied for this because he's suffering from depression because of it all, and he's got a house. He'll go out the front balcony. He'll look over solar farms. He'll go out his back door and he'll
35 look over to solar panels. Both sides of him. No farms in-between. Just his.

And this is just ridiculous that this is happening, so why – why can't they change it. People in the cities, don't they like solar panels on their rooves or what, but we've got to put up with it. We're only farmers. That's the only reason, and it's like if you
40 own a house in Sydney Harbour and you get a letter in the mail saying, right, they're going to put a high rise apartments in front of your house so you can't have a view of the city and the harbour. How would you feel. You put yourselves in our position.

45 You think we're greedy. We're not greedy. We are people who've lived on the land all our lives, and we do not wish to be looking over solar panels for the rest of our lives, what we've got left of it. So in – that's about all I've got to say, and I just hope that you take the lot into consideration with the way they're organised. Some of

these people are only telling you what they want you to know. They're not
informing us at all on some of these things, and once they're there, who's going to
police the – what they're doing, if there's dust or fires and things like that. All you
need is the Corella to chew some of the wires and they short out or something and
5 then there's a fire.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Feuerherdt.

MR D.J. FEUERHERDT: Have we got to take in – out more insurance, but they
10 won't cover us because there's solar panels there.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Thank you, Mr Feuerherdt. We've run out of time.

MR D.J. FEUERHERDT: Okay.
15

MR HUTTON: I do appreciate you speaking with us today, and it has been noted
and we appreciate your time. Thank you very much. I'd now like to move to
speaker 27, which is Bill Schulz. Bill has been allocated five minutes. We'll just
establish connection with Bill. Okay. We're just going to jump over to 29 while we
20 establish connection with Bill. So 29 is Stephen Monte. Stephen's been allocated
five minutes. Good afternoon, Stephen.

MR MONTE: Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

25 MR HUTTON: Yes, we can. You're welcome to commence.

MR MONTE: Yes. Yes. Thank you, Commissioner. I was – this is something
close to me. I want to make it quite clear that I'm very much in favour of the Walla
Walla Solar Farm. I'm 61 years of age, married to Julie for 40 years. I've got three
30 sons, and their partners who over the years have educated me about climate science.
I have three grandchildren and it's the future of my children and grandchildren that
concerns me. I'm not a conspiracy theorist; however, since my school days I've
always had a healthy concern about the powers behind the world economies driving
our future.
35

I'm a loss adjuster, for 40 years involved in assessment of damage, natural disasters,
including fire, flood and storm, and there is no doubt I'm in a growth industry. I was
involved in the preparation of the methodology for the Supreme Court of Victoria in
relation to class action for the 2009 Black Friday bushfires. I've attended many
40 flood events, and including the events in Cyclone Debbie and others. I can say
without doubt that the fires that occurred on our doorstep in 2010 were some of the
most destructive I have seen in my career. In my view, you can disregard the advice
of the climate scientists at your peril. What can we do, I'm an ordinary person,
hence I'm here today, adding to emissions like the next man, but my family have
45 taken steps to mitigate our carbon footprint. Fossil fuels have driven up our carbon
emissions and the world is warming. Who is going to lead the charge for

renewables. It certainly won't be the pointy end of the global financial markets. Just look at their track record.

5 For many years they've had the ability to drive down – or drive to renewables, but when there's plenty of money and power involved they will not pursue those markets. We must start our own progress with a focus on micro communities initiating and progressing renewables, including projects like the Walla Walla Solar Farm. It will be up to us to create a difference. Solar power will improve in the next 30 years as the technologies get better, but we must start now. The capabilities of the project at the Walla Walla Solar Farm will help our communities not only providing a renewable source of energy, but will help these communities develop and understanding of renewable energy and the reasons why we must pursue this technology.

15 I've looked into the proposal and the Walla Walla Solar Farm is a viable project with a dedicated 30 year lifespan. It will provide jobs for local people in the construction stage, as well in its operational life. To put it purely, it was science fiction when I was a young bloke to think that solar power in a relatively small area, 600 hectares, would have the capability of powering 90,000 homes. It is just crazy. It's my understanding the land can still be used for grazing and the repatriation will occur after the 30 year life of the project. There will be objectors to any project like this, and the great thing about a meeting such as this, it gives all interested parties a voice. I need solar power. I need renewables. I need our communities to clean up their acts. I say this, as I love my family, my children and my grandchildren, and I want to be seen in their eyes as someone who cares for the environment. I sincerely hope this project proceeds. That's basically my contribution to the debate this afternoon.

30 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Mr Monte, we appreciate your comments, as well. We're now going to jump back to 27, Mr Schulz. Bill, are you there?

MR SCHULZ: Yes, I am.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Hi, Bill. Thank you. You've got five minutes allocated.

35 MR SCHULZ: Okay. Thanks, Mr Chair. Ladies and gentlemen, because we're on the phone, I'm not sure who I'm speaking to, so I – just thank you for the opportunity. What I – why I have registered to speak today is that I don't live at Walla, I don't live anywhere near Walla. I live at Wagga and I've had the experience of working – trying to work with one solar developer that has now got their project up and established and I've now got a second one being built on my doorstep and a third one proposed, and what I thought I could share with the group today is what our experiences have been and, in particular, now that, particularly, the first one is built, what we're actually experiencing, because prior to it being built it is all on paper, it's all theory, and everyone makes lots of promises.

45 So what do we see. First of all, let's make it clear, that the land will, effectively, be clear felled. So – which in itself is in contradiction to the local land services who are

not allowed to comment on tree removal, even though we're running a paddock retention scheme and a replanting initiative, they're looking to protect the Superb Parrot, the Grey-crowned Babblers and other endangered species, as per their website, which covers off the Walla Area. We've got a situation where NGH, as the environmental office that have done the EIS have – the document is frighteningly or
5 embarrassing similar to what they proposed at Wagga versus – or, well, compared to what they're doing at Walla. So my opinion there is very little due diligence undertaken to actually analyse what the site offers. I noted that they actually have only had a couple of visits to the site in regards to environmental impact, so how can
10 that take into account migratory birds.

The timber that they cut down on the site next to us was up to 200 years old. So plant all the trees you like, and I say that having planted 11 and a half thousand trees on my property at my expense over the last 13 years, but you will not replace 200
15 year old trees with whatever is planted today. They talk about things like dust control. Once again, our observation, it's absolutely impossible and all that happened on our site is approximately seven megalitres of drinkable water was used to ameliorate the EPAs concerns, but didn't actually do anything to reduce the amount of dust coming off it.

20 The firefighting onsite is a massive issue. Our local fire captain has had 40 years experience in this, and they had one gate provided for us, and you cannot drive a fire truck up and down the rows, because the inability to turn around safely, and yet he was never consulted and I'm sure the same has happened there. Weed control, once
25 again, they talk about grazing of – underneath the panels to control weeds and to control fire hazards. The site next to us, after they were promised that, are now saying that they're not sure whether they can have sheep there, because they're concerned the sheep will chew on the wiring and make it non-functional, and consequently you can look at the NGH own website today and there's photos there of
30 the Bomen Solar site covered in Paterson's Curse that we have to live next to.

So what do we see today. We see massive glare issues and reflection. This has gone to the extent that now the Environmental Protection Authority from New South Wales has confirmed there is an issue and that they are now trying to find a way to
35 get Bomen Solar to overcome the issue. The reason I bring all this up, there is no measurement around lots of these things, but, in particular, the visual impact afterwards. If there's a noise impact, there's a decibel rating. With visual impacts they use words like minimise, mitigate, moderate, low screening, but there's no actual measurement. They talk about flat land, undulating land, but there's no
40 degrees of slope attached. There is nothing to actually quantify what it is that's being promised or saying is not an issue.

Our community has got to a point now where we've got a marriage that's on the rocks, because the wife says, "We need to move. I don't want to live here", and the
45 husband says, "But this is my family. This is my community. This is home for me and I don't want to go anywhere", even though he's very unhappy with the solar.

The visual impact of these sites once built, I describe it – it’s a bit like you’re left with a scar. Every time I drive down my – through my property, I look to the west and it’s in my face. I feel as though, if I was a victim of crime, that I had to look up every day and see my perpetrator. This is having a massive mental impact on our
5 community. It’s having a massive mental impact on myself, personally. The mental, financial and visual collateral damage left behind by this will last and last and last for years to come, and my concern is – I’m not opposed to solar.

I have a massive issue with the location of this site and what impact it’s going to
10 have on those around it. So I put it to Planning that don’t knock this back or approve it as it is. Solar needs to go into locations where there is no detrimental effect to the community, i.e., out on the plains country to further west, which is identified by the solar modelling, or the renewable energy modelling that is put up by State Planning themselves, so to approve this - - -

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MR HUTTON: Mr Schulz, we’ve just run out of time.

MR SCHULZ: Yes. Yes.

20 MR HUTTON: I’ll just ask you to wrap up there, if you don’t mind, please.

MR SCHULZ: So – thank you. So in summary, I think to approve this is just going to create a scar on the landscape, which is in turn going to create a scar on individuals that cannot be overcome and will not be overcome in the life of the solar
25 development, and I implore that if anyone has any concerns about what solar looks like, don’t make decisions based on the nice reports that have been written by the developer, but go and have a look at what’s happened elsewhere, talk to people that are now stuck with it next door to them. Thanks, Mr Chair.

30 MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you, Mr Schulz. We’ll just move down to speaker 31, David Robinson. David’s been allocated five minutes. Good afternoon, David.

MR ROBINSON: G’day. Can you hear me okay?

35 MR HUTTON: Yes, we can.

MR ROBINSON: Great. So I’m a resident of the Greater Hume Shire, and my family’s farm is located in Walla Walla. So today I wanted to speak about three
40 particular points. So, firstly, the economic impact to Walla and the surrounding communities, such as my town of Jindera, the presumed visual impacts of the solar farm and the supposed loss of productivity of the allocated land. Firstly, regarding the economic impact, growing up in a very small regional town I know full well the struggles these communities face. Working with businesses in the frontline healthcare sector within these small communities over the past six years, including in
45 Walla, I also know how much of a positive impact just a single additional business can have on the town.

This solar farm presents a once in a generation opportunity to boost the local economy like never before, the results of which will be shared by all in the community for generations to come. Whether it's in hospitality, accommodation, construction, local contractors, education, the local GP and pharmacy, everybody
5 will get a go out of this. It might just be more variety of beer at the pub or fresher beans in your coffee because the café is now making a lot more, either way, it's going to be positive. Secondly, I wanted to talk about aesthetics. I believe the modifications made to the design of the solar farm, particularly the improvements to any potential visual amenity to the neighbours was certainly fair and reasonable.
10 Everywhere you look you can see manmade infrastructure, whether it's power lines or roads, buildings or cars, so if you do happen to catch a slight glimpse of the panels as you drive past the area, it will soon become part of the norm.

I know I'll be happy to point it out to my kids and explain why it's there, and when
15 they inevitably drive past it in their self-driving electric carbon neutral cars in the near future, I'm confident that they'll be okay with the fact that it's there, too. Growing up on a farm, I've always understood that being on the land means good seasons and bad seasons, and that's why I wanted to make my final comment about the production of the allocated land. I've read in a number of the submissions
20 opposing the project that the proposed site will take a large amount of highly productive land out of production. I believe that this is not only inaccurate, but it's actually the opposite of what will happen.

If it goes ahead, this parcel of land will be productive all year round and harvesting a
25 free resource that we have endless access to yielding a product that we all use and rely upon every day. On top of the obvious increase of productivity of this parcel of land, the fact that sheep grazing around the panels will also happen potentially makes it the most productive land in the area on completion of the project. So I find the argument that you can be more productive with that land and that it's too good for
30 solar misguided and simply untrue.

I'm sure if somebody came up with a drought and floodproof variety of crop that everyone consumes and can be harvested all year round very farmer in Australia
35 would be onboard, and as one of the most food secure nations in the world and who produce substantially more food than we consume, a farm yielding clean energy is of much higher value to the nation right now. Just because this is new and made of glass and isn't what we're used to, doesn't mean we shouldn't embrace it. Again, this is a once in a generation opportunity for the local community to get a boost like it's never had before, and it's from an ethical source that's built to improve the world
40 we live in. So I fully support the project and I hope to see it get across the line. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Thanks very much for your time this afternoon.
45 Speaker 30, Lynette LaBlack. Lynette, just getting connection with you there.

MS LaBLACK: Yes, thank you. I'm here.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Good afternoon. You're welcome to commence.

MS LaBLACK: for the panel. It's a genuine heartbreaking crisis and it's beyond my comprehension how any responsible, intelligent government would
5 prioritise such anti-Australian foolish energy policy resulting in the mass dumping of future electronic garbage on a beautiful, pristine and reliable and productive rural area, such as this Walla Walla Solar site. I'm a great believer and participant in genuine sustainability, organic production, reducing waste and recycling, but it is shocking and appalling to hear how misled many supporters are when large scale
10 solar has absolutely nothing to do with environmental care at all. It is a desecration of productive, uncontaminated and – uncontaminated land and is equal to environmental vandalism.

It brings nothing positive whatsoever to the district. Boman Solar, they brought their
15 own workforce local jobs. Nothing to go on. No more jobs in the future. It agriculture, burdens many water contamination risk, productivity impact from the effect, and it's a glaring visual amenity nightmare and a massive public waste burden with not planned destination. In theory are unreliable – unreliable renewable con is driven by a socialist ideology. It will be extremely costly to electricity
20 consumers and severely curb Australian industry and manufacturing creating energy poverty. Even Audrey Zibelman, CEO of AEMO, says that's where we will end up to sort the system out. There are no at all. Dr Alan Finkel states

MR HUTTON: Yes. Mrs LaBlack, it's quite hard to hear you. There's – it's
25 breaking up.

MS LaBLACK: Okay. I'll try to - - -

MR HUTTON: Are you able to get to a position where you're confident the
30 connection's good.

MS LaBLACK: I'll try the speaker. Is this better.

MR HUTTON: That does sound better, yes.
35

MS LaBLACK: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Please continue, and just confirming you've been allocated 10
40 minutes, so continue. Thank you.

MS LaBLACK: Alan Finkel, Chief Scientist, says we need to look with a bit of sophistication at what is inadvertently omitted, and this applies very much to large scale solar. If you look at the whole life scale of large scale solar, it is not one bit sustainable, clean, green or zero emissions. This is all completely untrue. There is
45 intensive energy required for manufacturing the PVs, extensive toxic pollution, the leaking of sulphur hexafluoride from solar manufacturing and renewable switch gear and circuit breakers and wind turbines. SF6 is the most potent greenhouse gas

known to man. 23,500 times more warming than CO2, and it remains in the atmosphere for 1000 years. Why aren't that considering that.

5 That's far worse than CO2. We are also with solar – large scale solar, we are also importing mass toxic waste, future waste, which is going to impact neighbouring landholders because it has such a huge potential for heavy metal, land and water contamination. This seems to have been completely ignored by the department. Once the land and water is contaminated, I don't know how on Earth they think they're going to fix it. Recently – actually, last weekend there was a massive
10 hailstorm with tennis ball sized hail which decimated my family's neighbouring roof, completely destroying the solar. What are they going to do with the solar and that land when solar has ruined – I mean, the solar has been ruined by a massive hailstorm. That potentially is quite likely to happen.

15 So this is actually future electronic garbage which should not be put anywhere near agricultural land. Climate alarmism, which has been mentioned several times in this discussion is not necessarily agreed with by many experts and scientists. In fact, some climate alarmists have apologised for creating hysteria. They now realise that large scale solar is worse for the environment than fossil fuels, and they're promoting
20 nuclear energy. Regarding mapping, I think that has already been mentioned by one of your speakers, Jennifer Jacob. I'm really quite disgusted with the department. It seems corrupt and scandalous that the promise mapping that was meant to be delivered long ago seems to be purposefully withheld and the DPIEs commentary silenced in order to shove these horrible developments through under false pretences.

25 Only five to six per cent of Australia is actually arable land, so if the department really believes in global warming, this makes it even more important to protect the land which is viable for food and fibre production. It's absolutely essential that this piece of land is maintained. It is not an insignificant area of land for Australia.
30 Australia's fertile soil is Australia's heritage and cannot be replaced. Solar energy will never be more important than food. Monetary bribes are being used to fracture the community, and this is happening in many places where solar is being built. The windfall may be – well, solar hosts may think they're getting a windfall, but what happens when this solar is abandoned or the developer goes broke and they are left
35 with the responsibility of the astronomical cost of cleaning it up. This will be a complete disaster.

Conditions are often ignored. We've experienced this at Bomen with various industries up to a decade, 12 years, even 2005, nothing's been done fixing up
40 contamination, and the toxic waste, there is just no plan at all. New South Wales has no recycling for toxic PV. They're only now trying to work out whether this is even a possibility, and it seems like it's too expensive and too difficult to do so at the moment. I'm very disappointed and quite disgusted that lies, false assessments and imaginary claims are propagated by the department and public servants and many
45 supporters. It appears that money seems to have a way of convincing people that something so damaging is delightful. So Bill Schulz has actually covered some of

my points regarding trees and the glare issues, which is a very significant issue with Bomen Solar.

5 Bomen Solar and Numurkah Solar will never – nothing will ever limit our view that we have of those two horrible developments, and the trees that they’ve planted, tiny specks of trees, a lot of them have died and they make no difference, because it’s undulating land. So very disappointing. It’s very sad to look out and see such damage to the environment when this was, really, such a beautiful – naturally beautiful area that made us feel so happy looking out into the distance, and also the
10 dust and noise are very excessive.

I wanted to just make the point about the sheep grazing which was mentioned, because at Parkes now and solar, grazing sheep there, saying that they – they seem to have enough feed, but that trial resulted in some of the sheep dying a very cruel
15 death. They were caught up by their wool in the rotating universal joints, and just how would ever be monitored I do not know, because the landowner would definitely not be allowed to go in and out of the solar development. It’s very disappoint to hear public servants, MPs and promoters using lies, complete untruths put forward this development that would benefit foreign companies and Chinese
20 manufacturing with no advantage to Australia at all for the future. It would constrain our energy and production and it would make us even more reliant on China. Australia needs energy independence, not control by foreign government, especially during the time of COVID and the way national security is going, we have a very hostile communist regime trying to take over lots of the world and the last thing we
25 want is to be reliant on energy, which is very costly to Australia, when we have plenty of our own natural resources in coal and uranium to use.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Ms – sorry, Mrs LaBlack. We’ve just run out of time there.
30

MS LaBLACK: That’s okay

MR HUTTON: Did you have any last comments you’d like to make?

35 MS LaBLACK: I’m basically finished. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you very much. We move to speaker 32, Andrew Kotzur. Andrew, five minutes, and you’re our last registered speaker for today. So when you’re ready, Andrew.
40

MR KOTZUR: Good afternoon. Thank you for your time. The various solar applications have caused significant division in our community, and as a 57 year resident of Walla Walla, this is really heartbreaking. I think the Walla Solar Farm application is significant at two levels, both at the national, as well as at the local
45 level. I think the majority of our population, this is looking at our – the wider community. I think the majority of our population agree that we move to a more sustainable model when it comes to energy and the environment.

Given the momentum we have seen, the growth in wind and solar power generation needs to and will continue. We still have a long way to go here in Australia in developing sustainable power generation. The location of these facilities is a challenge. While we'd all like them to be away from where we live and out of site,
5 remote generation facilities have their own issues, managing things like synchronisation and voltage regulations, and there are the limitations when they're trying to pump energy into the skinny end of a network.

10 Pre-COVID I had quite recently spent time driving around southern Europe and the US, and it appears that solar and windfarms are becoming just part of the new rural/agricultural landscape, and we are seeing this here in Australia, as well. For these reasons I support the development of solar power generation, and I think, unfortunately or otherwise, it's inevitable that some of these developments will need to be located in more densely populated, but rural areas. Assuming that this proposal
15 was to go ahead, then managing the development would be crucial, and I think that's where you, the Commissioners, need to consider your roles in this.

From a local perspective the visual impact is something that needs to be very closely considered. I can understand the concerns expressed by the neighbours to the
20 proposal. I don't think anyone would choose to change the face of the rural landscape with the installation of large scale solar. I feel for those who are impacted and would like to emphasise that it's important that any approval needs to provide a reasonable outcome for the local community and those most affected. I think the community expects a reasonable buffer zone, the use of trees to screen and following
25 from the last speaker's comments, making sure that that screening is in place and maintained, and also taking whatever other measures are needed to minimise the impact, particularly on those neighbouring properties.

I live on a rural area myself, not one that would be impacted, but I can certainly
30 appreciate their concerns and distress over that, and I'm not sure that there's a solution that will keep – and, in fact, I'm sure there's not a solution that would keep everybody happy, but we need to be aware of that, because we are in a rural area and so, yes, in summary, that's my comments on it. so thank you.

35 MR HUTTON: All right. Thank you very much. That's appreciated. Okay. Well, that brings us to the end of our electronic public meeting today. I'd like to thank everybody who's taken the opportunity to speak with us and participate as part of this process. Zada and I have definitely appreciated your input, and we thank you again. Just a reminder that in the interests of transparency and openness, there will
40 be a copy of the transcript from today's meeting put up onto the Commission's website in the next few days, so you're welcome to take a look at that.

Also please note that the Commission will be accepting any written comments from the public up until 5 pm, Thursday the 12th of November 2020. So that's next
45 Thursday, 5 pm. We will be accepting written comments from the public. You can submit your comments via email or post or by using the Have Your Say Portal on our website. At the time of determination the Commission will publish a statement of

reasons for the decision, which will outline how the panel took the communities
views into consideration as part of our decision-making process. For now, though,
we thank you for watching the IPC electronic public meeting on the proposed Walla
Walla Solar Farm and from all of us here at the Commission, thank you for being
5 with us and good afternoon. Thank you.

MATTER ADJOURNED at 3.44 pm INDEFINITELY