

MR A. HUTTON: Good morning and welcome to the Independent Planning Commission's electronic public meeting on the State significant development application for the Culcairn Solar Farm SSD 10288. My name is Andrew Hutton and I'm the chair of this IPC panel. Joining me is my fellow Commissioner, Professor
5 Zada Lipman. Before we begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

10 Neoen Australia Pty Ltd proposes to develop a 350-megawatt solar farm with a battery storage facility approximately four kilometres south-west of Culcairn in the Riverina region of New South Wales. Commissioners make an annual declaration of interest, identifying potential conflicts with their appointed role and for the record no conflicts of interests have been identified in relation to a determination of this State significant development application. You can find additional information on the way
15 we manage potential conflicts on the Commission's website.

In line with regulations introduced in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has moved this public meeting online with registered speakers provided the opportunity to present to the panel via telephone or by video
20 conference. In the interests of openness and transparency, we are livestreaming this public meeting via our website. As always, the public meeting is being recorded and a full transcript of the meeting will be published on our website in the next few days.

The Commission in its role in this determination. The Independent Planning
25 Commission was established by the New South Wales government on the 1st of March 2018 as an independent statutory body operating separately to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and other agencies. The Commission plays an important role in strengthening transparency and independence in the decision-making process for major development and land use planning in New South Wales.
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The key functions of the Commission include determining State significant public – or development applications, conducting public hearings and public meetings for development applications and other matters and providing independent expert advice on any other planning and development matter where requested by the Minister for
35 Planning and the Planning Secretary. The Commission is the consent authority for State significant development applications for which there are reportable political donations, objections by the local council or more than 50 public objections. The Commission is not involved in the Department's assessment of this project or the preparation of the assessment report.
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So where are we in the process. This public meeting forms one part of the Commission's process. We have also undertaken a site inspection. We've met with the Department, the applicant and the Greater Hume Shire Council. The inspection notes and the transcripts from all the meetings we've had are published on the
45 Commission's website. After today's meeting, we may convene with relevant stakeholders if we need further clarification or additional information on matters that

are raised today. The Commission will be accepting written comments from the public up until 5 pm on Tuesday the 9th of March 2021, that's 5 pm next Tuesday. Following today's meeting, we will endeavour to determine the application as soon as possible, noting that there may be a delay if we find that we need to seek
5 additional information.

So the purpose of the meeting. The Commission invites interested parties, including stakeholders and members of the public, to make a submission they consider appropriate. The commission is particularly assisted however if submissions are
10 responsive to the Department's assessment report and also to the recommended conditions of consent. The Commission has available to it all the submissions already made to the Department during exhibition of the environmental impact statement and members of the public are encouraged to avoid duplication on their
15 submissions if they have already made an application. The Commission also notes that there are factors that, by law, it is not permitted to take into account when making a determination and submissions on such topics cannot be taken into consideration. These factors include the reputation of the applicant and any past planning law breaches by the applicant.

20 So how will this meeting run. Before we proceed I would just like to go through how we're going to conduct the meeting today. First up, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment will present the findings of its whole of government assessment of the application. And then we will hear from the applicant. And then we will proceed to hear from the registered speakers in the order that they
25 are set out on the published schedule. I will introduce each speaker when it is their turn to present to the panel. All speakers have been advised of their speaking time ahead of the meeting. It is important that everybody registered to speak receives a fair share of time. As such I will be enforcing timekeeping rules and as the chair I do reserve the right to allow additional time where it is necessary or needed to present
30 new material.

If you have a copy of your speaking notes or any additional material to support your presentation, we would encourage you and would appreciate it if you could provide that as a copy to the Commission. Please note, any information given to us may be
35 made public and the Commission's privacy statement governs our approach to our information and our privacy statement is available on our website. Thank you. I would now like to call the first speaker for today's session which is Nicole Brewer from the Department – or DPIE and, Nicole, you've been allocated 45 minutes. Good morning, Nicole.

40 MS BREWER: Good morning, Commissioners. Can I just check that you can hear me okay?

MR HUTTON: Yes, we can. Thank you.

45 MS BREWER: Great. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thanks.

MS BREWER: My name is Nicole Brewer and I'm the director for Energy Assessments in New South Wales with Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and I'm joined and supported today by Iwan Davies, team leader, and Tiana Vanderhoek, senior assessment officer in my team. I have a presentation to summarise the Department's assessment. The Culcairn Solar Farm is a State significant development project – if we could have the next slide – and has been assessed under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act which is the planning legislation under which all developments in New South Wales are assessed, whether they are State significant or local or regional.

We have taken a comprehensive whole of government assessment of the application. By that I mean that we have included and consulted with key agencies and Greater Hume Council in preparing our assessment. The Independent Planning Commission is the consent authority for the application for two reasons in this case. The first is that there were more than 50 objections to the application and the second reason is that the Greater Hume Shire Council has objected to the project. And so as you can see from the slide, we're now at the final stage of the process. I do want to note that through the process, as shown by the flow chart, there have been a number of formal and informal opportunities for the community and other stakeholders to provide input to the process and we are now at the determination stage where the final decision will be made by the Commission on the merits of the application. Next slide please.

So the project is located north-east of the town of Walla Walla. The project is a large scale energy project with 350 megawatts with around 900,000 solar panels at 4.2 metres high. The project also includes 100 megawatt, 200 megawatt hour battery energy storage. The transmission connection is directly to the TransGrid transmission line that traverses the site and the site itself will also have a substation. And you can see from the figure that in the regional context there is also the closest solar farm which is the approved Walla Walla Solar Farm to the south. And further to the south, closer to the township of Jindera is the approved Jindera Solar Farm as well as the Glenellen Solar Farm that has recently been publicly exhibited.

The company said that the project will operate for around 30 years with the conditions allow that as long as the development footprint and the height remains the same, infrastructure could be replaced or upgraded to take account of more efficient technology. In this case the disturbance footprint in 892 hectares. The investment is around \$630 million and the company, Neoen, has offered to pay community contributions to the Greater Hume Shire Council of \$5 million and an additional community benefit fund of \$4.8 million. There are also employment opportunities during construction and operation. In construction that is around 500 jobs and in operation, 10 jobs. Access for the project is from the Olympic Highway, Benambra Road and Weeamera Road. Can we get the next slide please.

So we have exhibited the EIS and received 228 public submissions which is a relatively large number for a solar project. I do note that the other projects in the

region have also had significant interest from the community. In this instance around 64 per cent were objections. And looking at the location of submissions for those within five kilometres, around 70 per cent objected and around 30 per cent supported. We did consult, a range of government agencies and none of those
5 agencies raised any objections and, as you would be aware, the Greater Hume Shire Council has objected to the project. The Department also held a public meeting in Jindera and undertook a site visit in November 2019. The site visit included inspecting the site to understand the layout and also meeting with landowners in proximity to the site so we could understand the potential impacts and concerns.
10 Next slide.

The key issues raised in submissions included concerns about the loss of agricultural land, visual impacts and amenity impacts on local residents such as noise and dust, biodiversity impacts associated with clearing on site as well as cumulative impacts
15 with the other proposed solar projects in the region. Next slide. The Department understands the – and recognises the concerns of the local community – perhaps if we could have the next slide – and the council about the potential impacts of this project and other solar projects on agricultural land in the area particularly in relation to the cumulative impacts and the use of the land for solar. And we understand that
20 this issue needs to be balanced in the decision-making both for this project and, more broadly, for renewable projects across New South Wales.

In regard to agricultural land, the site is currently used for sheep grazing and cropping wheat and canola and it would continue to be used for sheep grazing around
25 the panels. We are aware of the concerns from the community and council around the important agricultural lands mapping that has been underway for some time by DPI Agriculture. In this case, the assessment was based on the available agricultural land mapping but also site testing which did confirm the land class. So for this project the whole site has been mapped class 4 agricultural land as it is constrained
30 by waterlogging issues and DPI Agriculture accepted that assessment.

The Department does recognise that the land is important and productive and that the amendments to the project have resulted in the retention of over 345 hectares of agricultural land. That's around 25 per cent of the original project site. Around 32
35 hectares would be subdivided from the south-western lot within the project site to allow that landowner to continue their farming practices. There are also requirements in our recommended conditions to manage groundcover during the operations and also to restore the land capability to agricultural following any decommissioning.
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The Department also considered the cumulative impact of the four projects proposed or approved in the area and that would have a cumulative combined development footprint of around 2000 hectares which is less than 1 per cent of land being used for agriculture within the Greater Hume LGA. Next slide.
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In terms of visual impacts, the site is generally flat. Our assessment covered the potential visual impacts of all residences and I note that the project is not visible

from the towns of Culcairn or Walla Walla. I want to focus today on the five residences with one kilometre. So through the assessment process, following exhibition of the EIS, the company has responded to community concerns with changes that are in the documentation on the Department's website.

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Those changes have included removing panels from north of Cummings Road, reducing the impacts on residences R9 and R29. Increasing the project setback from residence R24, which was an additional setback of 60 metres making the total distance from the infrastructure 498 metres setback. That's to the east of that residence. And for R33, an additional 120 metre setback to a total of 250 metres set back from the infrastructure. Neoen reached an agreement with R14 and there was also additional vegetation screening for R17 and R24. Next slide.

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Focusing on the potential visual impacts from residences to the north, residence R9 is to the east of the project and there is a setback of 585 metres and there's landscape planting proposed to the predominant views from that residence. R24 is to the west of the project and the infrastructure is an L-shape in this area and there are panels 498 metres to the west and 780 metres south of the residence. Views from the residence, particularly to the east, from that residence have intervening vegetation and outbuildings and there's also vegetation along the creek. And the project includes a 20 metre vegetation buffer. That's proposed adjacent to the residence.

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To the south, the panels are 780 metres from the residence and there is a vegetation buffer, proposed as part of the project, immediately to the south of the residence. We are aware that the landowner wasn't satisfied with either the proposed amendments or the proposed vegetation buffers immediately to the east and south. The Department's assessment considered that the impact on the residence would not be significant with that existing vegetation and the proposed buffers. Next slide.

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In the southern area of the project, R19 is setback 360 metres to the west of the infrastructure and R17 is setback 1.1 kilometres to the south of the infrastructure. Both residences have Back Creek intervening between the residence and the site. And there is enhancement of that riparian vegetation that is proposed as part of the project which would also further reduce the views. R33 to the south is currently an unoccupied residence that – the setback was increased at this location to 250 metres from the residence and would also be landscape planting immediately to the north of that residence.

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In summary, the Department considered that with the amendments to the layout, the associated setbacks, the proposed landscape planting and the implementation of the recommended conditions there would be no significant visual impacts on surrounding residences and the rural character and visual quality of the area. Next slide.

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The key amenity impacts in relation to the project around traffic noise and dust will really happen during construction. So that construction period for this project is around 18 months and I note that within that there will be more certainly our

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conditions require that all construction is undertaken between seven to six, Monday to Friday, and eight till one on Saturdays. These are the standard construction hours that are imposed under the recommended guidelines from the EPA and they're typical of construction projects more generally.

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The noise assessment has shown that construction can generally comply with the EPA noise criteria but that there would be some exceedances for two residences during construction and that's for R19 to the west and R33 to the south. And that would be for around a three week period during the construction schedule. In relation to dust impacts, that was also a concern to the community. There would obviously be disturbance on the site.

The conditions include a requirement to use the standard mitigation measures to minimise that dust generation and that's things like water trucks and also to establish groundcover as quickly as possible over those disturbed areas following construction. We have also considered the cumulative impacts of the project in the region. It is unlikely that there would be cumulative noise or dust impacts or noise impacts with the nearby Walla Walla solar farm, even if construction occurred concurrently. Next slide.

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MR HUTTON: Are you there, Nicole, sorry?

MS BREWER: Yes, I'm there but the slide doesn't seem to have

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MR HUTTON: yes. There we go. Thank you.

MS BREWER: I can – thank you very much. The traffic route is from the Olympic Highway, Benambra Road and Weeamera Road. There will be one new site access constructed off Weeamera Road. For that – for Weeamera Road, up until the Hurricane Hill Quarry, which is to the south of the project, that road is sealed up until the site entrance for the quarry but north of that, between the quarry and the project site, it is unsealed. So our conditions include requirements for upgrade of that section of the road to the site entrance and to widen and seal the road. And those upgrades were developed in consultation with council.

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We have considered the cumulative impact with Walla Walla Solar Farm to the south and – which shares part of Benambra Road for its traffic route and the roads were found to have capacity if the two projects were constructed at the same time. Our conditions include a traffic management plan which would include scheduling construction activities and deliveries to minimise road transport movements to avoid conflict with school buses and other road users and including consideration of the other approved solar farms in the Greater Hume area. In regard to biodiversity, the project has been designed to retain almost all of the vegetation on the site. And around .33 hectares of woodland would be cleared and that would be offset in accordance with the biodiversity offset scheme. Next slide.

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While I focus today on the key issues that the Department assessed, the Department also assessed other issues and they included Aboriginal cultural heritage, water supply, bushfire risks, land management, decommissioning, rehabilitation, workforce accommodation and heat island effect. And we've developed conditions in
5 consultation with the government agencies and council and they include a range of management plans including landscaping, traffic, biodiversity and heritage.

In regard to bushfire risk, which we're aware communities are concerned around these projects, we've consulted with Fire & Rescue New South Wales and the Rural
10 Fire Service and that our requirements and our conditions that we have developed with them but also include an emergency management plan. In regard to heat island, a previous study found that changes to the air temperatures would be negligible within 30 metres of the development footprint and that any impacts would be further reduced once vegetation screening at the project boundary became effective.

15 I also note that vegetation such as groundcover under panels also influences that movement of air. Neoen has confirmed that the development footprint is more than 30 metres away from the boundary of adjacent private properties and groundcover would be established on site. And there are areas of retained vegetation on site and
20 areas of vegetation buffers. There is also a requirement for an accommodation strategy to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to house construction workers and prioritise the employment of local workers.

Our conditions also include strict outcomes for the decommissioning and
25 rehabilitation of the site and the end of the project life and that includes removing all of the project infrastructure from the site within 18 months of ceasing operations. And then to restore the land to the pre-existing agricultural capability. I want to highlight that the Department's compliance unit is responsible for monitoring and enforcing these conditions of concern should the project be approved. And they also
30 investigate any complaints and undertake site inspections in particular during construction. Next slide.

MR HUTTON: Just checking again, Nicole, you've got – that slide has changed
35 over for us.

MS BREWER: community.

MR HUTTON: Just seemed to be - - -

40 MS BREWER: Yes. The "Benefits of the project" is the right slide.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Yes, we just had a little bit of break up there but I think you're right to continue on that "Benefits of the project" slide, thanks.

45 MS BREWER:

MR HUTTON: I think we're just experiencing a little bit of technical issues. Just trying to re-establish connection. We will just check the connection.

MS BREWER: Sorry, can you hear me?

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MR HUTTON: Yes, we're back. Yes. Thank you, Nicole. Sorry, we just had about 30 seconds or so of just breaking up in the comms there. If you can just commence again on the slide "Benefits of the project" please.

10 MS BREWER: Sure. Thank you, Commissioner. Our assessment also considered the benefits of the project and that includes employment, a significant capital investment, \$5 million in contributions to council, \$4.8 million in a community benefits scheme. The project would also assist in transitioning the electricity sector from gas and coal fire power stations to low emissions sources. And solar projects
15 and other renewable projects also support a range of State and Commonwealth renewable energy policies. The project provides 350 megawatts which can power 130,000 homes. The battery energy storage would also allow the project to store solar energy for dispatch to the grid outside of daylight hours and during periods of peak demand which can contribute to grid stability and energy security and provide
20 energy when it's needed. Next slide.

Finally, just to summarise our evaluation of the project, the Department has completed a comprehensive assessment in accordance with the requirements of the planning legislation. That has included community consultation, detailed advice
25 from government agencies but we are aware, and we acknowledge, that some members of the community remain strongly opposed to the project and that there are concerns about the environmental and amenity impacts on the local community.

The Department does consider that the changes made to the project, through the
30 assessment process, have significantly reduced the residual impacts of the project particularly on visual impacts, on nearby receivers and also on maintaining agricultural productivity on site. And we note that while these changes have addressed several of council's concerns, council still maintains its objection to the project. But we consider, with these changes and the implementation of the
35 recommended conditions that the environmental and amenity impacts of the project can be managed to achieve acceptable outcomes. Next slide.

The Department also considers that the project would provide significant economic and social benefits to the region and it would contribute to the transition of the New
40 South Wales economy away from a reliance on fossil fuels in accordance with the New South Wales government policy. So overall, the Department considers that the project achieves a reasonable balance that's appropriate between maximising solar resources and the benefits of the project and also minimising the impacts on land uses, local residents and the environment. So the Department has recommended that
45 the project is approvable subject to the recommended conditions. Thank you to the Commission for the opportunity to present the Department's assessment and I would be happy to take questions.

MR HUTTON: No worries. Thank you, Nicole. I would just like to thank you again for the assessment report and the detail that you've covered in that, and for the presentation today which summarises that. Thank you, again. Professor Lipman, do you have any questions for the Department at all?

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PROF Z. LIPMAN: I don't have any, no.

MR HUTTON: Yes. No, I think at this stage, Nicole, I don't have any questions either. Only to thank you again for your presentation and I think on that basis we will move on to the next speaker. Thank you.

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MS BREWER: Thank you, Commissioners.

MR HUTTON: Okay. The next speaker is Neoen. I have Joanna Murphy coming in on line. Also I understand there's a number of presenters as part of the package from the applicant. Joanna, are you on line?

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MS MURPHY: Yes. Hello. Are you able to hear me?

MR HUTTON: Yes, I can. Good morning.

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MS MURPHY: Excellent.

MR HUTTON: You have been allocated 40 minutes. Do you have a slide pack?

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MS MURPHY: Yes, I have. I've just started sharing that through my computer, if you're able to see that.

MR HUTTON: At this point we can't see it but we will just let the technology resolve itself and I will let you know when that comes up on the screen. Still just waiting on the slide pack. We're happy to wait. That's no problem. Okay. Okay. Joanna, I can confirm that we are looking at a slide pack that's on the main screen so you're welcome to commence your presentation. What I would ask, that when your colleagues take over presentation of various aspects, if they could just introduce themselves for the benefit of the transcript. But yes, look forward to the presentation.

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MS MURPHY: Excellent. Thank you very much. So good morning. My name is Joanna Murphy. I'm the project manager for Culcairn Solar Farm from Neoen. And today the presentation is intended to give you a brief overview of the project and then also allow my colleagues to talk about our responses to the submissions.

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So just a very brief overview. So as you know the project Culcairn Solar Farm is approximately located four kilometres south-west of Culcairn or 50 kilometres north of Albury. It is located within the Greater Hume Shire local government area and is directly located below the TransGrid 330kv transmission line. It is also very close to the proposed Walla Walla Solar Farm which is on the south of the map. This map

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was produced as this project is one of four solar farms which are proposed in the region and that shows you that the Culcairn Solar Farm is located to the northernmost section of the map.

5 The reasons for choosing the Culcairn Solar Farm site were many. So the first one is the close proximity to TransGrids 330kv transmission line which has sufficient capacity to host the Culcairn Solar Farm capacity. It also is close to transport routes such as the Olympic Highway. The solar yield is really great in this particular area. There is minimal vegetation removal required for this particular project. The visual
10 impact is low as well as the biodiversity impact. There is also low Aboriginal heritage impact and the number of receivers with close proximity, in this case one kilometre, is limited to five.

The total capacity of the Culcairn Solar Farm is 350 megawatts AC which is
15 supported by 100 megawatt battery and 200 megawatt hours of battery storage. It is expected that the 800,000 megawatt hours will be produced throughout the year annually and the 900,000 kv modules are going to be on single access tracking configuration. There will also be an onsite substation, which is shown by the purple rectangle, as well as the battery which is co-located next to the substation in the
20 centre. The total area of the project is 1039 hectares of privately owned agricultural land with a solar footprint of 892 hectares. The zoning of the area is rural one which is utilised for cropping and will continue to be used for grazing. I will now hand over to Nicola for the submissions.

25 MS SMITH: Good morning. It's Nicola Smith from NGH and I am the project manager from the environmental assessment side so we did the environmental impact assessment for this project. So just briefly the summary of submissions. So the EIS, after exhibition, received 228 submissions of which 146 were objections and 81 were supporting the project and one providing comment. You can see. on the right-hand
30 side of the slide, the list of community concerns and the weight as per the objections received. So land use, number one, followed by economic, visual impact, fire risk, biodiversity and then renewable energy with a lot of support.

The Greater Hume Shire Council objected to the project due to concerns about the
35 loss of agricultural land and amenity impacts to nearby neighbours but it is noted that the mayor originally voted in favour of the project but and voted against the project in order to ensure additional scrutiny of the project. Eleven government agencies were consulted and provided advice throughout the project and the assessment period.

40 Below is a breakdown of the number of objections received and support received and their distance away from the project. It is noted that there are now, with the amended footprint, five non-associated dwellings within one kilometre and 14 between one and two. Some of the things of support included renewable energy generation and
45 subsequent environmental benefit; benefits to the local and regional economy; stance against the opposition tactics; continuation of agricultural practices within the project site, which includes sheep grazing, and that will be discussed further into this

presentation; the community benefit fund, and that's to boost the local development initiatives of the Walla Walla and Culcairn area; general support for the project; the suitability of the site and the beneficial long-term implications for the community.

5 So tackling the number one key concern, land use and project size. So whilst agricultural land, there are a number of reasons this project site was chosen. And those pertaining to land use include the relatively flat topography of the project site, the land is already predominantly cleared and used for cropping and grazing and it is compatible with the land use zoning RU1. Further assessment of the environmental
10 aspects of the project site indicated that the land and soil capability mapping is mapped as class 4 under the Land and Soil Capability Assessment Scheme OEH 2012 and is land that is considered to have moderate to severe limitations for cultivation as a result of environmental constraints.

15 Further to this, there is no mapped biophysical strategic agricultural land – or BSAL – and this is also supported by a soil survey that was done by McMahon Earth Science that found chromosols across the site which are known to have moderate and cultural potential. Since project inception, the size of the project footprint has been reduced. All infrastructure has been removed from the north area of Cummings
20 Road and therefore over 345 hectares of agricultural land has been retained. Further to this, agricultural practices can still occur and, as I mentioned before will be discussed later, and include grazing. Due to the nature of the development the agricultural capability of the land would not be affected by this changing land use and Neoen, following decommissioning of the project, would return the land back to
25 existing levels of agricultural capability.

I will just mention here the heat island effect which was a concern. A study commissioned by the Greater Shepparton Council on the Shepparton Solar Farm, and this was referenced in the project EIS, found that increases to air temperature would
30 be negligible within 30 metres of the development footprint. So therefore there is a setback of at least 30 metres between the development site and the footprint of the solar infrastructure and therefore the project would not significantly impact agriculture activities of neighbouring residences. This low impact is further reduced by native vegetation what is existing and also proposed vegetation screening.

35 MR HUTTON: Nicole, before you move on, would you mind if I ask a question there, just around the mapping.

40 MS SMITH: Sure.

MR HUTTON: I note the reference to the regional mapping and the class 4 and I note the reference to BSAL mapping. There was obviously some infield sampling that was undertaken by McMahons and I've read through that report and a subsequent ag impact statement prepared by Riverina Agriconsultants that addressed
45 – or discussed that a little bit further. I just want to seek clarification because in my reading of those reports there was no conclusions made around verifying, through the field sampling, that in fact it was class 4 or in fact that it was in BSAL – or was

BSAL even though it wasn't mapped. So typically you might expect that the consultant doing the infield work would make some sort of statement in relation to either not being class 4 or not being BSAL. I didn't see that in the report. Are you able to add any comments to that or provide comment?

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MS SMITH: Sure. So in regards to the BSAL land, it's quite a stringent soil survey that's required to determine whether land is BSAL or not. And often that would be undertaken if it has already been mapped as BSAL land. I guess the general soil that's mapped for this area doesn't include – like, a cell vertisols, that type of thing, that would warrant a BSAL investigation.

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In regards to the class 4 mapping, I guess the findings from the soil survey, the fact that they're chromosols, they've got moderate agricultural potential, the moderate water-holding capacity, the topsoil was found to have a low CEC, or cation exchange capacity, which indicates low nutrient availability. They all point to, I guess, low agricultural potential and therefore it does fit into that category of class 4, with class 3 having less environmental constraints and I guess that's the other point to make. The soil survey doesn't make an assessment of environmental constraints.

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MR HUTTON: Yes. In my reading the soil survey didn't make a statement in relation to the ag class. It - - -

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MS SMITH: No.

MR HUTTON: Right.

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MS SMITH: And they don't often do so.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

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MS STIEBEL: I'm continuing on now and my name is Lisa Stiebel, head of communications and engagement at Neoen. Just to carry on from what Nicola was saying in relation to agriculture and solar coexisting, we have, as a company, been taking a leading role in the co-location of sheep grazing with agriculture over the last two years. We now have grazing sheep under the panels on all five of our operating solar farms. We have led an industry-wide initiative to share information which has resulted in the Clean Energy Council's Agrisolar report which will be released in coming weeks. And we are just at the point of beginning a research project at Numurkah Solar Farm with Agriculture Victoria to start to provide more detailed stats on the potential for sheep grazing and the benefits that it is providing.

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Just noting that we are expecting that the overall capacity of the Culcairn Solar Farm grazing will be reduced by around 25 per cent, so maintaining 75 per cent capacity on site. And the quote at the bottom here is from Tom Warren, who is the landowner of our Dubbo Solar Farm, who has experienced, you know, around 80 per cent of normal stocking rates under the panels as well as during drought an actual increase in the potential availability of grass due to the concentration of moisture along the side

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of the solar panels which has actually meant that during drought he was able to continue grazing under the panels where he wasn't able to in adjacent paddocks. So we are confident and the host landowners as well are committed to the continuation of sheep grazing under the panels on Culcairn Solar Farm.

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MR HERON: Hi, my name is Garth Heron. I'm head of development for Neoen Australia. I just wanted to say a few things on the economic impact of the project. Projects like this are a substantial investment in the community and we, in building these kind of projects, we see both an initial impact on the community in a very positive way during construction, but we see a lot of ongoing economic activity in the area long after the project is built. So one thing we've been doing with our projects is upping the amount of local content that we have. We have done a number of economic impact studies as well on this project and I will probably point to an economic impact assessment that was done by Oricon for us on the next slide.

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Now, this is consistent with the numbers that were shown by the State. I think the State was saying that during construction they would expect up to about 500 jobs during construction and up to 10 jobs ongoing. Those jobs are based on probably a per megawatt figure whereas the Oricon figures, on the next slide, these are based on our site and a full assessment of the project in its entirety. So what we're looking at is an injection into the New South Wales economy somewhere in the order of A\$660 million. Most of that is from the flow on impacts that you get when you build a project like this. So that is all the other businesses that benefit from building a project like this. About 177 million of this is a direct spend in New South Wales economy.

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We're looking at 350 onsite jobs. That's just onsite. But there are many, many jobs associated with this project that aren't onsite. So 1546 indirect jobs have been associated with a project of this scale and this is what Oricon found under the study. In terms of ongoing jobs, again, you know, the \$52 million spent annually in the economy, 37 of that is coming from flow on impacts so other businesses benefit from us being there. But \$15 million a year is our direct spend into New South Wales associated with this project. We are going to create six onsite jobs but there's many, many other indirect jobs, jobs here in Canberra for operating the project and many other jobs around Australia, 113 indirect jobs in total. So we're looking at, you know, 120 – or 119 jobs associated with this project around New South Wales.

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UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: In terms of the social impacts, this has been a concern both – and has been a theme of support in terms of the submissions. And Neoen has committed to the sum of \$10 million in community benefits over the lifetime of the project. I should note that the Clean Energy Council last year did an assessment of the number of wind and solar projects that were offering community benefit schemes and their assessment was that 65 per cent of wind projects offered community benefits and only 15 per cent of solar projects. So we've gone – in response to the concerns and the community opposition, we have gone, I think, above and beyond what is expected at an industry level. And we have been really keen to make sure

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that the community benefits are tailored in a way that makes most sense to this community.

5 The voluntary planning agreement negotiations with the Greater Hume Shire, there is a community benefit fund that will be administered by an independent foundation which will work with the Greater Hume Shire and with the local community to allocate annual funds. And we also, in relation to the amenity impacts during construction, have offered a series of one-off payments at the start of construction to those in proximity to the site and along the construction traffic route.

10 This slide provides an indication of the community engagement process that was undertaken and it's fair to say from, sort of, 2018 up until 2019 it was a fairly standard community consultation process. However in response to the concerns and the community feedback, particularly at the community drop in session that was held
15 in May 2019, we made a significant change to consultation as usual. We found someone who had a strong mediation and complete management experience and appointed her as our local community engagement expert. She held over 130 kitchen table discussions, most in people's homes, in order the people had the opportunity to ask their questions and to express their concerns or express their support in a safe
20 way, given that there was quite a lot of opposition to the project within the public square. And so this has really enabled us to provide I suppose a much more responsive and attuned engagement process which focused on three groups, the near neighbours, the wider community and the business community.

25 We were also able to get a really clear – a much clearer picture of the level of support that there was within the community and to be assured the community did in fact have a strong social licence. And for us to be able to provide opportunities for site visits so that people could see for themselves what a project would look like, and also to be able to tailor our community benefit sharing scheme to what people were
30 interested in and wanted to see, particularly from the communities of Walla Walla and Culcairn and the development committees for both of those towns.

We developed a community booklet which mapped the concerns and the issues that had been raised and the solutions that we had proposed ahead of the DA submission
35 and we continued to respond to those concerns throughout the submission process as has been detailed in other areas.

MS SMITH: Nicola Smith again from NGH. This next set of slides will be referring to visual impact which was the third highest key concern amongst the
40 public submissions. So Neoen has engaged with surrounding landholders throughout the environmental assessment period to gain access to their properties so specialists had the capacity to take panoramic photographs from their residences towards the project to produce some photo montages which – and to be able to overlay graphic representations of what the visual impact of the project infrastructure would be.

45 These montages were used in a visual impact assessment and they describe the potential impact on visual amenity during the operation of the project and also help

to assist in developing a visual mitigation strategy. It is noted that an agreement was reached with R14 and this residence is now considered an involved receiver. And then with the removal of all project infrastructure from the north of Cummings Road has brought the number of sensitive receivers within a one kilometre radius of the project to five. It is also noted that all the riparian vegetation and the native vegetation patches throughout the project footprint are going to be retained.

So I will just detail some of the visual mitigation strategy and what ongoing consultation has resulted in. It has resulted in the removal of all project infrastructure from the north of Cummings Road. A concept landscape plan was developed to incorporate vegetative screening for all receivers who were deemed to have an impact on the project infrastructure, visual impact, and these include R24 and R33. R09 was deemed to have a low visual impact however Neoen have agreed to plant a five metre wide vegetation buffer along the project boundary to further screen broken views of the infrastructure from the residence. Visual impacts at R17 and R19 were identified as having a low inherent visual impact because of the low topography of the site and the existing riparian vegetation along Back Creek. Any visual impact will be further mitigated through supplementary plantings in the Back Creek riparian corridor.

Planting vegetation screening will also occur along the site boundary in order to screen views of the project from nearby receivers and public road users. All proposed screening would be to a minimum depth of five metres with more extensive landscape plantings for those receivers who are impacted and that will be to a depth – screening depth of 20 metres. The project will use non-reflecting materials and paints to reduce glint and glare. And the project will also minimise unnecessary night-time lighting of the development and use lower intensity lighting to reduce disturbance on near neighbours.

So the next slide is just the response to R24 specifically. So you can see from the top image, the location of the R24 point and then the residence is further to the west of that point and also the location of the vegetation screening that is proposed. An additional 60 metre setback from the residence of R24 has resulted in a separation distance of – and I note it's 498 metres to the project infrastructure from the actual point of R24, from the residence it's 550 metres, and existing vegetation will be all vented with additional vegetation for a distance of 20 metres – or a width of 20 metres. Distance from the project infrastructure to the south of the residence is now 1.2 kilometres and that will be a vegetation screen with a depth of 15 metres to the south.

So the second image on the slide shows the project infrastructure in the photo montage. This is highlighted so the extent of visual impact is highlighted in that third image in red. And then the fourth image is the photo montage overlay with the concept landscape plan, the additional vegetation plantings and that's done by Spiire Landscape Architects and these photos are all taken to the east.

The next slide is the response to R33 concerns. So noting that this is a derelict vacant residence and it faces the southern boundary of the site. It is also the closest receiver to the project boundary. To address visual impacts, the setback of project infrastructure has been increased from 120 metres to 250 metres and vegetation screening is proposed at a width of 20 metres to mitigate these visual impacts. So you can see from the map at the top, the first image is the location of R33 in reference to the project boundary and then the project infrastructure. You can see that additional setback and the location of the proposed screening vegetation. The second image is a photo montage with the visual extent of the project infrastructure including the fence. The second one is highlighted in red and the third is the landscape architect's impression with the vegetation screening and the mitigating of that visual impact.

The next slide references R17 which will have a cumulative impact because of its location equidistance between this project and the Walla Walla Solar Farm project, the visual extent. You can see in that second slide some of the project infrastructure through the riparian vegetation of Back Creek which is also highlighted in red in that last image. And so this will be – mitigation will include supplementary planting along Back Creek to fill in those gaps.

Going on to biodiversity, so biodiversity was also a concern raised through the public submissions. Throughout various stages of the proposal we have been able to reduce impacts to biodiversity and these are primarily through to design and through the footprint and mitigation measures. So specifically, again we refer to the removal of project infrastructure from the north of Cummings Road and we have been able to avoid clearing an additional 13 paddock trees because of that removal of the project footprint.

Overall the proposal has been able to avoid most of the patches of native vegetation which includes woodland and native grasses. 51 hectares of native vegetation patches occur within the development site. Only 0.33 hectares is proposed to be removed and this is less than 1 per cent. And the areas of this 0.33 hectares that would be impacted include a small area of derived grassland for internal access track within the site and also road upgrade along Weeamera Road between the quarry and the site access.

In addition to patches of vegetation within the site, there are also scattered paddock trees. From the commencement of the project we have been able to reduce the clearing of paddock trees from 99 down to 64. And these trees are isolated and are scattered across the site in low density but given the extent of site avoidance of all trees has not been possible. Many of these trees are experiencing dieback and are in poor condition but it has been a key focus to try and retain a many of these as possible. We have also been able to avoid clearing of some paddock trees within the internal layout. A common feature of these mature trees include Willows which constitute habitat for threatened and common water species. The reduction in paddock trees to be cleared has also reduced the removal of hollow-bearing trees. 22 hollow-bearing trees are now being retained since the original assessment.

One of the key focuses of the management plan stage will be implementing both the – by the management plan and a rehabilitation plan for the areas of native vegetation which are being retained. And the aim will be to enhance these areas. Some of these measures will involve ongoing weed control, hollow or nest box relocation which will include monitoring, reuse of fallen timber for habitat and regeneration techniques including strategic grazing. And these will all be detailed in the management plan stage.

10 Hairy Panic was also one of the concerns raised by the public. So Hairy Panic is also sometimes called Witchgrass and refers to a number of grasses in the genus Panicum. Some of the weed varieties include panicum capillare and these are very common in the local area and often mistaken for the native species panicum effusum. The weed variety is actually an annual grass from North America. Its seed head, which is dispersed by wind, can be a big nuisance and gathers in different places where there is a barrier. Panicum grasses are not listed as a priority weed under the Biosecurity Act however a general biosecurity duty applies to all plants in New South Wales and landholders have a responsibility to prevent, eliminate or minimise any biosecurity risks posed.

20 Therefore Neoen has proposed the following avoidance and mitigation measures to reduce biosecurity impacts and these include implementing standard hygiene control measures during construction, ongoing weed control during operation and strategic grazing beneath the panels which would also assist in weed control. So in particular in reference to the control of Hairy Panic, it would be beneficial for the operation of the solar farm to manage this weed because it would reduce the overall potential build-up of the seed heads over the panels and would also protect the welfare of the livestock as panicum grasses are also known to cause photosensitivity and issues in sheep. So therefore there is a benefit for controlling Hairy Panic for the project.

30 Going on to the next slide, cumulative impacts. So up on this slide we have a map of the locations of the solar farms in the Greater Hume Shire Council. The project is located approximately 1.2 kilometres north of the Walla Walla Solar Farm project at its closest point. Key cumulative impacts include visual impacts, particularly on R17, and also the loss of agricultural land. So regarding visual impact, as mentioned, with those images – photo montages individual impact section, R17 would be located approximately 800 metres from each development. And due to the distance, the existing vegetation and the area R17 to both projects would be limited – the views from R17 to both projects would be limited and both projects will be relatively low-lying.

40 So to mitigate, Neoen has committed to further mitigate these impacts by supplementary existing riparian vegetation which also has – along Back Creek which also has habitat – benefits to habitat connectivity and mitigating the loss of paddock trees. Regarding the loss of agricultural land, the development footprint of the project combined with other operational approved and proposed SSD solar farms in the Riverina/Murray region will be approximately 8000 hectares. The loss of 8000 hectares of agricultural land represents a small fraction or 0.09 per cent of 9.1 million

hectares of land being used for agriculture in the Riverina/Murray region and would result in a negligible reduction in the available productivity of the region.

5 of these proposed SSD projects go ahead within the Greater Hume LGA, they would have a combined footprint of approximately 2000 hectares and this is approximately 0.59 per cent of the 335,000 hectares of land being used for agriculture within the Greater Hume LGA. Sheep grazing can still occur under the solar panels through the operation of the project and, as with all solar projects, the land will be returned to existing levels of agricultural capability following
10 decommissioning and all infrastructure will be removed.

MR HERON: Yes. So Garth Heron here again. I just want to talk quickly about fire risk and the mitigation on sites such as Culcairn. So we own and operate a number of solar projects already in New South Wales, four of them in fact to date.
15 And fire risk obviously is something that we have to think about especially in light of the bushfires and grassfires that occurred last year. What we've done in relation to Culcairn is have many onsite fire management workshops on our project. So we had one at solar farm – sorry, Numurkah Solar Farm on the 18th of March 2020 and we brought in representatives from Fire & Rescue New South Wales, the Culcairn Fire
20 Station, Country Fire Authority and invited the Greater Hume Shire Council.

This allowed us to, I guess, help plan our fire risk and mitigation and what it would look like at Culcairn. Generally speaking, fire is something that we take very seriously because it not only affects the farms around our property but also the
25 equipment itself. So we are going to have, as we do on all of our projects, water onsite. We're going to have a fire plan and it is comprehensive and already for the project. Probably the most dangerous part of – in terms of fire risk for us is in managing grass around the solar farm itself.

30 So we're doing a number of things with that, the first one being obviously the sheep grazing to help bring down that grass level and reduce the fire risk. But also whenever we're mowing during summer and during dry times we carry water around with us because ironically mowing grass is one of the most dangerous things you can do in terms of fire. Overall, we also have management onsite with all of these large
35 projects and of course 24 hour monitoring here in our 24 hour operations room in Canberra. This gives us a good view of the site and makes us aware of anything that can crop off, if it does crop up, in terms of fire.

40 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Thank you very much. That's the end of our presentation.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you very much for that presentation. It's appreciated. Zada, do you have any questions you would like to ask the applicant?

45 PROF LIPMAN: Yes, just one question. Thank you for the presentation. It did clarify quite a few matters. I just wondered, you talk about 100 heavy vehicle

movements a day during construction and I wondered whether that included the water carts.

5 MR HERON: Yes, I think it does but we will double-check that figure and get back to you in writing.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

10 MR HUTTON: Okay. I don't have any further questions so with that, thanks again for your presentation this morning. It is appreciated. Thank you for your time and we will move on to the next speaker. Thanks very much.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Thank you.

15 MR HUTTON: Okay. I believe we have Bill Schulz on line. Good morning, Bill.

MR SCHULZ: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

20 MR HUTTON: Good morning. How are you, Bill?

MR SCHULZ: Well, thank you.

25 MR HUTTON: Excellent. Bill, you've been allocated 10 minutes and you represent the Unone Valley Association and I apologise if I've mispronounced that.

MR SCHULZ: That's right. It's pronounced Unone Valley Association.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Bill. You've got 10 minutes.

30 MR SCHULZ: Okay. Well, I probably won't take it but I will go through what I've got to say. So ladies and gentlemen, I'm here this morning to oppose the large-scale development known as the Culcairn Solar Farm SSD 10288. I am president of Unone Valley Association which represents 50 landholders that now live adjacent to one completed solar project, one under construction and a third that will be built
35 immediately after the second solar power station is built.

I speak today against the development, now having experienced the construction and operation of these apparently modern power stations. First of all, I would like to refer to the large-scale solar guidelines and our community's experiences and
40 observations. So first of all, while this might sound obvious, I want to go through what your objectives are of the large-scale solar guidelines:

Provide guidance to the community, applicants, industry and regulators.

45 And I have a Department of Planning and Environment assessors environmental social and economic impacts for significant solar energy projects. The key thing

here is guidance to the community and impacts and social impacts and environmental impacts. Next point:

5 *Encourage industry to select suitable sites for projects to reduce the likelihood and extent of land use conflicts and environmental and social impacts.*

So to reduce the likelihood and extent of land use conflicts and environmental and social impacts. Next point:

10 *Facilitate better on-ground outcomes by promoting early identification of potential impacts.*

Clearly identified early on, question is has it been heard. Next point:

15 *Promote meaningful, respectful and effective community and stakeholder engagement –*

meaningful, I question once again –

20 *And to support the development of a sustainable solar industry in New South Wales, provide a clear, consistent and responsive policy framework.*

So clear guidelines and to this point – I will come back to that point later on in regards to clear guidelines. The next point I would like to talk about is 1.3 of the large scale guidelines:

25 *Strategic context. The New South Wales government supports the development of a sustainable solar energy industry in New South Wales and acknowledges it would help reduce reliance on fossil fuels thereby contributing to reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.*

30 So what do we know about the impact of solar on our environment. Very little. It involves mining. It involves land – it involves loss of prime agricultural land. No known recycling yet for solar panels and equipment globally. Chemical residues from the panels when they break. So what happens – what happens when – with all of this stuff? We don't know the answers yet and yet we think that it's right for projects to proceed. So in this context – sorry, so back to the strategic context, it refers to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 and deliver on commitments to the New South Wales Renewable Action Energy Plan. The question I have is yes, but at whose expense? Where – why are these placed where they are? The next point:

Support Australia's commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions.

45 So this is about reducing gas emissions – greenhouse gas emissions and yet how does it fit that it's okay to knock over mature trees? And to replace them with seedlings is not – is a negative greenhouse effect for probably 100 years. So that in itself is contradictory. These points may be strategic to New South Wales and Federal

Government but they are not necessarily good planning nor governance statements. So 2.2, where are large-scale solar projects allowed? Fundamentally on land zoned RU1. When we look at what RU1 is, RU1 is agricultural land.

5 The point of this is that when these developers are looking for large areas of land on which to put these projects, there is nowhere else to go other than on land zoned RU1. It has to go on rural land. So the fact that it's zoned RU1 doesn't actually make it right to put solar onto them. There needs to be more work done on suitable land not just based on the zoning. Large scale solar guidelines three, stakeholder
10 engagement. So scoping – meeting with the Department:

During scoping and before commencement of the formal development assessment process, applicants should contact the Department and arrange a meeting to discuss the proposed project.

15 So why is it that adjoining landholders are not provided with the same opportunity to have direct access to the Department? Why is it that when developments are put on exhibition, the local community might be given 60 days in which to respond and yet the developer can have a year, two years, three years to respond and the ear of the
20 government. This is not a fair or just process. And once again today there has been numerous requests to defer today's meeting and it has been knocked back. Site selection. I won't go over this too much, site selection, but the key – you refer to 4.2, key site selections, but it says:

25 *Sites with high visibility adjacent to other properties, adjacent to land, areas of significant historical or cultural landscape, biodiversity, areas of native vegetation or habitat with threatened species or ecological communities with and adjacent to the site. Agricultural, prime agricultural land.*

30 So the question I've got today to you, ladies and gentlemen of the panel, these guidelines, it's what you've been given to follow and I'm first to acknowledge that it's a very difficult task here. But I ask how you can support this development when there are no measurables around these motherhood statements. So how far from homes is it okay. What is the visual impact for a property that can see it. What is
35 measurables. What is acceptable water runoff and discharge from these properties. What is acceptable dust levels during construction. With the EIS, just how many hours did the assessor actually spend on the property. How many days did they spend there. What times of the year did the assessor actually spend on site.

40 Were they there at night to observe nocturnal fauna. Were they there to observe migrating birds like the Red Breasted Snow Robin and the Superb Parrot at different times of the year. Why is it okay to knock over mature trees and yet the local land service for that specific Culcairn area has got funding to preserve hollow trees and paddock trees. Why is it acceptable to – what is acceptable levels of biodiversity
45 impact. What is acceptable levels of damage to heritage. What are safe distances to live from large-scale solar. Do we know. Do we know anywhere in the world what

are safe distances. What research has been done around fire management with the solar power stations. Research – independent research.

5 So as a community, what have we experienced. What are we actually seeing once it has been built or during building. First of all, flooding. During and after construction neighbouring land was flooded, fences were knocked over, weeds were washed in – noxious weeds, both during and after construction because of the hard panel surface water is concentrated and then it runs across a surface and away it goes. It is not absorbed as they claim into the bed – into the land around it because it
10 up.

The visual impact. We were told there would be no visual impact and yet a quote from the Wagga Council general manager, Peter Thompson, it's like there's two suns. Not acceptable. From the New South Wales EPA, Katrina O'Reilly, "Yes, there is glare issues". From our local member of parliament, Joe McGur, "This is unacceptable". And now, having had to push after development for an independent visual assessment, they now openly acknowledge that some residents have between 5000 and 7200 minutes of glare per annum. This is glare not reflection. Let me say that again, independent assessor has stated that the residents have between 5000 and
15 7200 minutes of glare per annum. And yet the developers said there will be no glare.
20

The next point – just to explain very quickly my background. I'm a farmer. I've worked in agribusiness. But my wife and I, on our property, in the last 17 years have planted 11 and a-half thousand trees on our property. So we know a fair bit about
25 what it takes to grow trees. We have had failures and we've had success. I heard the applicant say that they were going to plant trees under mature trees and thicken up the rows and amend the visual impact. I can tell you now, young trees don't compete against mature trees. It's like a big brother sharing a bottle of coke with a little brother. It doesn't work.
30

Bushfire management. I'm deputy captain of our local brigade and while it might be signed off that they've spoken to the RFS and various others, I can tell you that, in our experience, we cannot drive a fire truck up and down the rows. They do not fit and there is infrastructure in the way. The eight foot high security fence means that
35 if we go inside there we are trapped. So we will not enter the site to put the fire out. And as we learnt last year, a big fire is started from a little fire so it is has not been put out on the solar property then the neighbours have to put it out on theirs.

So in closing, I ask you, the panel, to consider have you actually ever seen a large-scale solar development. Have you spoken to neighbouring and impacted properties of developments that are now in operation. Are we, as a society, as a planning panel – as planning panel consent authorities, are we prepared to learn and improve or are we going to go down a path of blind faith. Exactly probably what happened with the coal-fired power stations in their day. We are not critical of coal but are we heading
40 down the same uninformed path today. You will hear lots of emotion today from locals. That's the same emotion that is now a reality of my community. Living next
45

door to these developments is a life sentence, living next to the neighbour from hell
24/7.

5 So if you can't answer the questions around measurable outcomes then how can
approval be granted for this development based on the developer's nicely written
application when none of these people have to live next to it for the rest of their lives.
Thank you and if there's any questions.

10 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mr Schulz. Appreciate that presentation. We're going
to go to a short break now. We're scheduled to return at 11.50. So thanks very much
for those speakers this morning and look forward to recommencing the meeting at
11.50.

15 **RECORDING SUSPENDED** [11.21 am]

RECORDING RESUMED [11.50 am]

20 MR HUTTON: Good morning and welcome back to the Culcairn Solar Farm public
meeting. We will just recommence now off the schedule and now I would like to
call Jennifer Jacob to speak. Good morning, Jennifer.

25 MS J. JACOB: Good morning.

MR HUTTON: Good morning. How are you? You've been allocated five minutes;
is that correct?

30 MS JACOB: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

35 MS JACOB: Dear Commissioners, I have spoken strongly against the Walla and
Jindera solar projects and now Culcairn. It is very, very frustrating that the
Department and IPCN Commissioners are not listening to the serious concerns of
many people. Many requests have been made for these three projects to be face-to-
face meetings. A few people speaking via Zoom and email comments really don't
40 give justice. You need to be here. I look at the site with the people leasing land a
few – and – and – and one neighbour really is not good enough. I was just absolutely
shocked that the Walla and Jindera projects were given approval and especially with
Jindera on 22 December later in the afternoon. How disgraceful.

45 The Department says in its assessment report that it understands the DPI Agriculture
are doing their agricultural mapping program to find important agricultural land but
because it hasn't been finalised so it's not directly applicable to the projects. This is
exactly what each solar company says as well. How can the Department recommend

a project based on false land mapping. Many in our area sent in detailed submissions two years ago as it was so wrong. If our council, they found out for the solar – their submissions that this land will be mapped as important agricultural land. Well, why don't the Department and solar companies find that as well instead of using false
5 land classifications and this has led to smaller companies in our Shire going around to farmers wanting to lease their land to build projects less than \$30 million. This has already happened at Bowman. All they need is council approval and if it's refused they can take it to court.

10 Now, there are many, many worried farmers in our area because they are worried that their neighbours may take up this offer. The Government are more concerned with meeting Australia's energy targets than agriculture. On 24 February Mr Hussey from the Institute of Public Affairs said that China is responsible for 63.6 per cent of the increase in global carbon emissions since 2004 while Australia is only
15 responsible for 0.35 per cent of the increase. China isn't in the Paris Climate Agreement yet in Australia, meeting the net zero carbon emissions target, we've put over 653,000 jobs at risk in agriculture, heavy manufacturing and coal mining.

20 That would just be so disastrous for Australia and with the push for large scale solar where do all these solar panels come from and the associated electrical equipment? What happens to all of that? There's no recycling plant for it. It goes into landfill and because solar panels contain toxic materials like lead, that can leach out as they break down, this is going to cause both water and soil contamination. At Culcairn there's 900,000 panels. How can the solar companies just come in and wipe out the
25 environment? Wipe it out. Pull down trees, etcetera, wreck all the habitats of animals and wildlife and get all away with it. I cannot understand that and also the whole process of this is wrong.

30 It will be one – next month, three years since neighbours found out about this project. Ask them what the last three years have been like. It's – it's utterly disgraceful. The foreign companies make a deal with the landowners of the lease land first, then when the neighbours hear about it they had no idea initially how big and impacting these projects are going to be and the big thing is it affects all their livelihoods, their future planning plus their land values are going to be decreased. A recent land sale near
35 Glenellen did not get a bid because it was near a solar farm. I'm also concerned with the huge VPA that Neoen is paying council; \$5 million in the Community Benefit Fund of \$4.8 million.

40 When a company has to offer money to get your support alarm bells start ringing for me. If this project is so good for our area money would not need to be offered. The project would speak for itself and also, just in closing – in – in closing, I hope that this time, Commissioners, that you wake up and realise the decision you make will affect future generations. Don't just listen to what the Department says. Listen to us who live here. Thank you.

45 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Jennifer. I would now like to call Ryan Feuerherdt, please. Ryan, good morning.

MR R. FEUERHERDT: Good morning. Dear Commissioners, thank you for your attention today. I'm strongly against the Culcairn Solar Farm. Land where they want to locate the solar plant should not be for solar because it's nowhere near a renewal energy zone. Isn't the point of these selected zones these large scale
5 developments. The land here is zoned RU1 land is suitable for cropping and should not be used for this reason. It is as clear cut as that. Surely we have – we already have enough solar elements to improve these transmission lines to suit capacity of the grid. However, this company wants to put it here for the sole reason that it's easier for them.

10

The transmission lines can only carry a certain amount of electricity and if the structure is being built from South Australia to Wagga Wagga it will open up so – so much more appropriate arid and less productive land for these kinds of massive solar plants in their correct places. The solar farm proposed here, outside of the zone,
15 should be extensively smaller which would lessen the impact to surrounding neighbours. How will the project affect this development and where is the appropriate planning? It could be us as neighbours that pay the price if these developments lose their financial liability and liquidate. How then is the decommissioning going to happen if there is no financial guarantee?

20

Landowners will most likely not have the financial capacity to decommission and rehabilitate the site leaving instead a massive unproductive wasteland. There's so many risks to our neighbouring properties causing serious impacts including visual outlook, noise pollution, livestock impacts, construction – livestock impacts during
25 construction, heat – heat island, drainage and potential flooding to waterway in front of their house all with little mitigation. The entire boundary of the solar farm should be heavily streambed with dense vegetation including where I drive on Cummings Road almost everyday and will have a clear view with minimal roadside vegetation currently in place. I fear the glare from the solar will create danger to me and other
30 drivers along the road day-by-day.

30

I do not want to see or be involved in a tragic road accident caused by the glare or the distraction of a road user looking at the panels instead of concentrating on the road. Surely you would consider the lives of motorists above the Government and the
35 agenda. I've particular concerns about fire on the proposed development site especially as I'm an active member within the Culcairn South-West Fire Brigade. I believe that appropriate bushfire clearance should be available and consulted with the rural fire service in the development stage of this project prior to approval. Where is any correspondence from the New South Wales RFS in this – about this
40 development? I cannot see any.

40

On 10 December our fire brigade responded to a fire on the site of the proposed solar farm along Back Creek started by an unknown cause. This fire resulted in the case of wheat, trees and a haystack being burnt on that day with me, my father and my
45 cousin on that fire truck. We struggled to put out the front line of the fire and in certain places we actually had to pull away from the fire line due to heat and risk for our own lives. If this land was covered in solar panels on that day the fire would not

45

have been put out and this fire would have spread severely out the other side and on a massive front. It was a serious fire and we were lucky that we got there early enough to control the fire until support arrived. I doubt there would have been time for a meeting as what they're saying with the solar development.

5

At the end of the day they – they had 20 to 35 present at that fire location. The minimum number of staff they had could not achieve suitable fire suppression on the solar site should a fire occur. Our brigade has thoroughly discussed this development and will not end – enter under any circumstances due to toxic fumes, electrocution and entrapment, as well as unknown risks that maybe present. We don't even know if we can actually confront the fire from outside the site due to direction of potentially toxic fumes which leave the neighbours and towns at massive risk. We are the closest brigade to the site and do not have breathing equipment which leaves the question who is to fight the fire and how are the company going to deal with issues such as along with the electrical risk that is highly likely to create a fire storm and burnout the whole district. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Ryan. Thank you for your time this morning. We're now moving on to speaker 6, Michelle Pumpa. Michelle, you've been given five minutes. Good morning – good afternoon in fact.

20

MS M. PUMPA: Good afternoon. Yes. My name is Michelle Pumpa. On the documentation the Pumpa family land is shown as R08 - - -

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

25

MS PUMPA: - - - R33 and R09. We have got a mixed agriculture business consisting of sheep, cropping and hay production. This land is a business asset and it's also where we live. The size of the proposed development is far too large. The development footprint is twice the size of the Walla Solar property and nearly three times the size of Jindera and Glenellen. We are going to have a six kilometre boundary with the development. Our land borders three sides of the development covering all of the eastern side and the bulk of the southern end of the project. I have emailed into you the developer's site plan and I have marked our land in green which I hope that you received.

30

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MR HUTTON: Thank you. We will get that through the office. Thank you.

MS PUMPA: Okay. So R33 is a triangle-shaped farm. It will be bordered on two of the three sides by panels. The remaining side which fronts Weamera Road is the proposed transport route for all construction vehicles. The nominated site access point is right next to our farm access entrance. With the approved Walla Solar development less than one kilometre away the same road access is nominated for both projects. You're asking the same people, geographically, to take the strain of not one but two potentially huge industrial developments. There is nothing built into the development consent that protects our rights to farm, to spray our crops, to to

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continue normal farming practices. Our land provides a buffer to the development for the benefit of others.

5 The level of community benefit sharing is disproportionate to the proximity of the site. The closest to the development will be most affected especially during 16 to 18 months of construction. Adjoining mere landowners will have zero benefits. Local towns in Greater Hume may have medium benefits and Albury and Wagga will have the most benefit whilst being furthest away from the development. Furthest away from the view, the noise, the dust, increased traffic and general disruption. What's
10 disappointing is we are a community here and a community is defined by more than just bricks and mortar. A community is made up of people. This project is not for the betterment of our people. It is for the betterment of the developer and the overseas shareholders.

15 The DPI came for a site meeting in November 2019 and a representative said it was his job to make sure the project wasn't unbearable for adjoining landowners. If it goes ahead people have said they don't want to live here anymore. It is going to be unbearable, huge and unsightly. If a neighbour puts up a shed that's unsightly at least you can potentially mitigate the view yourself by using trees or a similar
20 structure. There is no possible way to mitigate an electricity generating development of this size. How do we mitigate an industrial development covering 892 hectares. This is not something of our choosing. This is something that has been thrust upon us due to our geographical location. We have zero assurances that our business won't be adversely affected.

25 I do not think that the concerns of adjoining landowners have been given enough weight. We have been – been implicated in this since mid-2018 and whilst the – all the Departments and the developer will move on to their next project we will still be here looking out and living next door to this industrial landscape for the next 30 plus
30 years. Interestingly, last month the New South Wales Government put out this A 20 Year Economic Vision for Regional New South Wales and this is the picture on the front cover – if we can get it in - - -

35 MR HUTTON: Yes. We can – thank you. We can see that. Yes.

MS PUMPA: You can see that?

MR HUTTON: Yes. Yes.

40 MS PUMPA: So that's their marketing campaign for regional New South Wales that was out in February this year.

MR HUTTON: Yes. We can see that, Ms Pumpa. Yes. Solar panels in the rays. Yes.

45 MS PUMPA: Not so palatable. No one wants to be next to this. Thank you very much for your time.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Michelle. Much appreciated for your time this afternoon.

MS PUMPA: Thank you.

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MR HUTTON: The next speaker is speaker 7, Diane Inglis.

MS D. INGLIS: Hi. How you going?

10 MR HUTTON: Hi, Diane. Good afternoon. You've been allocated 10 minutes.

MS INGLIS: Yes. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

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MS INGLIS: Yes. Thank you for your time. Look, to start with I'm really uncertain as to why there's a process to make a submission to object, support or make comments in this development when overwhelmingly in the first stage of this process 80.9 per cent of the opposing submissions came from the Greater Hume Shire Local Government Area. So that's 80.9 per cent local Shire residents actually objected to this project. So why aren't you listening to the local residents and why doesn't the old saying "majority rules" come into play. It is quite clear that there is a bias towards these type of projects being approved and it clearly demonstrates what it's like to be a small yabby in a big dam and as we know – or maybe you don't know – farmers are very resilient people. They cope with many challenges and within this area the farmers are very fortunate that they can diversify their land to offset for drought, floods, frost, etcetera, and they have the ability to plan ahead for these situations.

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So because of this they have the ability to help out their fellow farmers who may be affected by drought, therefore, they can send feed to other parts of Australia and participate in hay runs such as Burrumbuttock Hay Runners, and most recently our families supplied feed to the farms affected by the devastating fires in 2019/2020. Mind you this was donated hay from generous farmers in the Greater Hume Shire, this same area, where you want to have solar installed. The proposed site is being placed on prime agricultural land. This land, when it was leased by my family for three years, was able to successfully grow highly productive crops, have stock graze on the crops, be able to grow their mixed farming operations and at the time of leasing this land they were also in the midst of a drought and that was along with the rest of New South Wales and Queensland.

However, they were still able to bale this crops and still have the ability to send much needed seed to other drought-affected farmers in New South Wales and Queensland.

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So wouldn't this make a great news story, "Prime agricultural land in the Greater Hume Shire no longer able to assist their fellow Australian farmers with feed as the land is being turned into industrial wasteland to facilitate the Government's energy agenda". So taking away prime agricultural land will also have a long-term flow-on

affect for local agricultural businesses in these small communities. It will affect the transport industry because there will be less grain, hay and livestock that will be transported. It will affect agricultural businesses that stock fertilisers and animal products as less of this will be required.

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There will not be a need to purchase or upgrade silos or have hay sheds installed as there will be less grain and hay to store, and there will be less production at the local oat mill as you cannot mill solar and there will be impacts on agricultural machinery suppliers and their contractors and the list really goes on but, unfortunately, the local communities are being marketed with false and enticing information. The local businesses should realise if they do benefit from this it will only be for a short period. Now, I'm also concerned about the lack of dense screening along Cummings Road. The panels will be clearly visible along Cummings Road and this is a concern as the glare from the solar panels will affect driving visibility.

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I am concerned for the safety of my son who catches the school bus from the front gate of Roseview Farm. This is located directly opposite this planned site. I am concerned about the many other drivers who use Cummings Road, the school bus drivers, the elderly, who will be impacted by the glare of the panels as the company report that Cummings Road has natural screening and that's simply not true, and what about the fire risk. The land along Back Creek Road is mapped as bushfire prone. There was a recent fire on the proposed solar land indicating the increased risk of fire within our area. So why is it that it's mapped as bushfire prone and I just want to know is there a bushfire risk management plan, and it should also be noted that the landowners that wish to have the solar on their land have not grazed sheep on that property for many years as noted in an article from Landcare and that's what I submitted in my first written objection.

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So my question is why would you go back to grazing sheep knowing that they have an issue with the weed silverleaf nightshade. So how can you guarantee that the weeds will be maintained. So this project is huge and its cumulative effect is significant. In Neoen's June 2020 submission regarding development amendment item 3.3.1 states the removal of the north-eastern array area near Billabong Creek. This was not removed by the company to decrease the size of the project. It was due to that landowner removing themselves from the project. Again it's more lies to satisfy the community and the panel that they have made amendments to the size of the project. This development is way too big.

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And now on to mental health. This development is increasing the risk factors for suicide and suicidal behaviours due to mental illness. Alcohol misuse, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness from Government officials that are not listening to their concerns. It's a stressful life event that is caused by this development and social dislocation. So an article in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health that's titled "Suicide in Rural Australia. Are farming-related suicides different", the article's first sentence states that farmers are vital for maintaining the production of food and fibre in an environment of ever increasing populations and market demand. Wow. Vital. The article also states that Australia's

farmers have been identified as at risk of psychological distress and heightened rates of suicide.

5 The mental health of affected landowners as a result of this development does not
matchup to the New South Wales Government's stand on mental health and rural
suicide. The level of resilience of our local farming families due to the solar
development has diminished. Resilience of these farming families now equal severe
anxiety and depression. A mental health report states that agricultural stresses is a
10 contributing factor to depression and an increase in suicide rates. The thought of
turning prime agricultural land into a sea of panels is enough to send the adjoining
landowners into a depressive state due to this agricultural stressor. Also it is
interesting when you read the current strategic framework for suicide prevention in
New South Wales. It states that the priority area number 1 is building individual and
community resilience and wellbeing. Well, community cohesion, strength and
15 resilience have been thrown out the window in the Walla and Culcairn communities
as a result of these developments.

Community fraction is high. The level of bullying and victimisation, the threats to
20 hurt my family business with mistruths have been appalling. Personally, my families
physical and mental health has taken a toll as they try to preserve prime, diverse
agricultural land while the Government try to appease the energy bill. I cannot
understand why you don't legislate for all new homes that are being built that they
must have solar installed as they currently have to meet a particular star rating. This
is just a prime example of agriculture being considered an insignificant state
25 development and a solar farm as a state-significant development. We must
remember we cannot eat solar. Food, fibre and fodder should be considered a state-
significant development.

30 So to reiterate my – my main points, the management of weeds is of grave concern
especially considering the history of poor management leading to the – to the
decision to cease running sheep. It appears there's an insufficient bushfire
management plan given that the farmland next to the proposal is mapped as bushfire
prone. Dense screening along Cummings Road has not been addressed so glare from
the solar panels will be a hazard for road users. There's a lack of concern
35 regarding the impact of mental health and how such developments pose a substantial
risk factor in increasing agricultural stressors which have increased depression and
anxiety. Short-term monetary gain for local business will not equate to long-term
gains if any gains at all.

40 We have two foreign-owned companies funding these developments. Is the solar
benefitting the local community and will the power actually be used given that two
other companies have been approved. So how will the grid manage a third company
and what about the impacts from multiple developments. Again, you must remember
that this is prime agricultural land. What other land in Australia can survive floods,
45 droughts and frost and still make an income. Please stop ticking the boxes. Read the
reports with a fine-toothed comb and remember farmers are vital for maintaining the
production of food and fibre. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Diane. Just to clarify, Diane, do you live near the proposed development?

5 MS INGLIS: I – I live in Walla and – but my – my son catches the bus from outside the farm.

MR HUTTON: Right. Okay.

10 MS INGLIS: So my family are opposite the farm. So we're out there fairly frequently.

MR HUTTON: Yes. That's fine.

15 MS INGLIS: Every day.

MR HUTTON: That's fine. I was just going to confirm if you were one of the residents nearby but that's fine. That – that's no problem at all. Thank you for clarifying that.

20 MS INGLIS: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

25 MS INGLIS: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. I would now like to move to speaker 8, Stephen Pumpa. Stephen, you've been given five minutes. Good afternoon.

30 MR S. PUMPA: Good afternoon to you. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to talk today. A brief background on my business in respect to the proposed solar development is the running of a 720 hectare enterprise encompassing milk, wool, grain and fodder production. Our business is located as a direct neighbour to the proposed development site on – three sides it will take up, if it goes ahead, resulting in six kilometres of direct frontage to the sites. That's – we're going to have six
35 kilometres of direct frontage on our property to be used as a buffer if it goes ahead. With this in mind there are a number of disturbing factors surrounding the development, to the approval process to this point, to the site and size of the proposed development and the cost.

40 The Government Departments to this point have showed little to no understanding of the farming business or indeed of their own Department's core business with the exception of the Greater Hume Council. The DPIs initial failure, and still failure, to correctly identify the classification of land as highly productive instead of reverting to old data to make an assumption is a glaring example. Follow this by the
45 Department of Planning and Environment, which ironically has its – in its recommendation for the approval of the project has shown minimal planning or care for the environment. For instance, the not-so-sudden closure of coal power stations,

the last one scheduled for 2035, and the new energy push has seen the development sway away from logic and reason.

5 We want the green power production in New South Wales result in less coal being mined or exported. I think not. The proposed site is not even within one of the three
renewable energy zones, nor is it 10 kilometres away from the next approved
development which is one of the old Department's guidelines that they've thrown
out. Furthermore, the Department has ignored Greater Hume Council's position
10 opposing the project. Given that the Council is the voice of the community this is particularly disappointing. Care for the environment is also lacking given the proposed removal of ancient gum trees and the associated destruction of an entire ecosystem that comes about with the establishment of an industrial estate.

15 The proposed site is 95 per cent and reliable high rainfall area lending itself to mixed farming operations and has proven itself as a sustainable production base even in the recent dry years. There are many varied costs involved within the proposed project, some which have already been born since learning of the proposal over three – roughly three years ago. Social and personal costs have already occurred with the fracturing of friendships and uncertainty within the community. New and old
20 neighbours have invested heavily in the area with a belief that the agricultural surrounds being maintained as per Government zoning. The proposed development will greatly diminish the visual amenity of the area. The introduction of an industrial powerplant to an agricultural area poses a significant environment cost and strain.

25 The real threat of increased air temperature, known as a heat island effect, increased wind speed, increased water run-off and erosion, panel glare both night and day are all stark realities associated with this development and to this point lacks scientific research and measurable constraints to manage them. The sheer size of the proposal, being 892 hectares, is both unsustainable and not warranted for these reasons. Given
30 that research of the heat island effect alone has only been carried out in one-hectare plot sizes resulting in a rise of air temperatures, the exacerbation of this area over – to nearly 900 hectares and the accumulated affects are untested. Again, the size of the project with the clearing of the land and the flat plain surface of the panels will result in increased wind speeds from the project site.

35 This with the combination of increased air temperature results in increased evaporation of plant stress for neighbouring properties for which, again, I have six kilometres of direct frontage. This equates to less production and profitability for neighbours. An increase in water run off with guttering or erosion effect will both
40 denude and scar the landscape. Again, the panels are designed to trap the most amount of sunlight achievable by pivoting throughout the day. Lack of sunlight leads to poor plant growth and, by – by the – by the panel's design, water is shed to a central point instead of evening over the ground, thus creating erosion. Given the proposed site's proximity to waterways the solar panel's material pose a real threat to
45 the environment with the makeup of the material both toxic and currently unrecyclable.

The increase in fire risk is a real concern, given the size and layout of the proposal, not only to near neighbours but to the wider community. The security fencing proposed and the connection rods between the panels ensure the area is a death trap and, as such, will not be entered. With this in mind the fire needs to exit the – exit
5 the facility before rural fire services will engage. Given the proposed – given the proposed are of 892 hectares and the proximity of the site to the township of Culcairn and Wagga Wagga this is a major problem not only for near neighbours but the wider community. Devaluation and restrictions on neighbouring properties due to the introduction of an industrial estate is of major concern.

10 Again, people have invested in a rural zoned area with the belief it will stay that way. Eight-foot security fencing, panel glare, inverter noise, increased traffic, disruption of farm machinery and animal movement, increase in criminal activity along with the already mentioned concerns are not desirable. There is nothing socially,
15 environmentally or economically sustainable about this project. Thank you very much.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Stephen. We appreciate you taking the time this afternoon to speak to the panel. Now, to move to speaker 9, Sean Raftery. Good
20 afternoon, Sean.

MR S. RAFTERY: Good afternoon. Thanks for the afternoon to speak today.

MR HUTTON: No worries, Sean. You've been allocated five minutes.
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MR RAFTERY: Yes. Sure.

MR HUTTON: Thanks very much.

30 MR RAFTERY: I wish to start by addressing the New South Wales Government Solar Farm SSD 10288 document listed in the Independent Planning Commission website. On the Department of Planning, Industry and Environmental assessment report dated 28.1.21, page 3, under Executive Summary, paragraph 9, heading
35 "Assessment", it is indicated that the project site is wholly located on Class 4 soils under the Land and Soil Capability Map in New South Wales (OEH, 2017). It seems in direct contradiction to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Australian Land Use and Management Classifications whereby they may classify as Class 3, production from dryland, agriculture and
40 plantations.

Sub-classes 3.2.0 Grazing Modified Pastures, 3.3.0 Cropping, 3.3.1 Cereals, 3.3.3 Hay and Silage, 3.3.4 Oilseeds. Neighbouring community uses include Classes 5.2.2 Feedlots, 5.3.4 Grain Storage and it seems strange to me to need grain storage in a community where the land is supposedly non-productive or Class 4. Furthermore,
45 under New South Wales Government guidelines by the Office of Environment and Heritage the Land and Soil capability Assessment Scheme would seem to easily indicate that these areas can be classified as LSC – Land and Soil Capability – Class

3. Class 3 land can be readily used for a range of crops including cereals, oilseeds and pulses. Class 3 land is especially widespread in New South Wales. It includes a large proportion of the major agricultural producing areas of the State.

5 However, Class 4 land, as this land has been classified, can be cultivated occasionally for the sowing of pastures and crops and is high potential of grazing land. So it seems that earlier speakers today in their addressing of these matters have chosen to follow a heavily skewed approach to the interpretation of these
10 classifications with a clear objective in mind. The language used is that which would indicate that this project is 100 per cent going ahead and everyone better just get used to it, “And here is some pretty slides showing how we’ve addressed everyone’s issues”. Let’s all remember that Philip Morris could always find a doctor or a scientist that would happily tell the world that smoking was safe for the – for your health when in reality the opposite was the truth. I urge you to bear that in mind.

15 Recently National Geographic identified that by the year 2050 the world would need to produce enough food to feed 9 billion people. That’s 2 billion more than now. 10 of the world’s top scientists were challenged to double the world’s food whilst simultaneously cutting the environmental harm caused by agriculture. They came up
20 with a five-step plan. Step 1 was to freeze agriculture’s footprint. For most of history when we needed more food we simply cut down more forests and step 2 was to grow more on the farms we’ve already got. This prompts the question why would we place a solar farm on proven high yielding farming land. This land under its recent lease provided thousands of tonnes of feed, both cereal grains and hay and
25 fodder, tonnes of which was sent to feed livestock in drought-affected areas of Australia so when the country was starving in drought this so-called Class 4 region was feeding it.

30 My fear is that this project is motivated more by greed and political point scoring than on sound scientific logic. Greed being that of foreign entities capitalising on a political landscape where achieving certain greenhouse targets are seen as more important than the local environmental considerations let alone the production of food. I challenge everyone – anyone to provide an example in this country where foreign enterprises such as involved this project gave more than they actually took.
35 They’re only here to make profit for their shareholders. In April of 2018 Forbes Magazine published an article identifying that solar and wind increase the cost of electricity prices and it is sad that the vast majority of the local community is being duped into the belief that with this project there will be local jobs and cheaper electricity. I’m yet to see anywhere a written, legally binding commitment to such
40 but, hey, best not to correct this mistruth if you want the community support and consent.

45 Even sadder is that the proposed environmental mitigation efforts seem grossly inadequate. Neighbouring landholders are given token considerations when it comes to the mitigation of our efforts outlined in the proposed solar farm. Shielding trees planted will take up to 10 years to be effective. Weed control is taken by nature. Details are almost deliberately vague, written in a way that will satisfy a bureaucrat

and/or politician but never really stand up in the real world environment but, hey, they're doing what they said they would do even if – though it was never going to be enough. The whole – this whole lot just doesn't add up.

5 Clearly an inaccurate classification of land, a deliberate reluctance to correct the community's inaccurate assumptions and the local benefits, being commercial and increased electricity pricing, and finally the lies by participating landholders in portraying the poor nature of their holdings, not to mention the grossly inaccurate compensation offered to neighbouring landholders. Yes. I thank you for the
10 opportunity to speak today.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Sean. It's appreciated that – making time available. We're now going to move on to Lauren Schoff. Lauren, good afternoon.

15 MS L. SCHOFF: Good afternoon. Can you hear me okay?

MR HUTTON: I can. Thank you. Good afternoon. You've been allocated five minutes.

20 MS SCHOFF: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MS SCHOFF: All right. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I grew up on the
25 proposed Culcairn Solar Farm. My childhood room directly overlooked one of the 12 TransGrid powerlines running through my family's property. These powerlines have been here all my life and they're as natural to the landscape as the trees and the pastures are. I believe in – in a few years this solar farm will be a normal part of the community as well. Change can be embraced or resisted. I look to a future where
30 renewable energy and conscious climate practices are standard. Climate change has begun and will continue to affect agriculture. As the third highest sector emitting carbon in the State farmers and the New South Wales Government are beginning to implement carbon offset programs.

35 Agriculture is changing and over the past weeks I have seen farmers publicly call for the industry to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. We cannot afford to remain stagnant. If we rejected innovation we would still be ploughing the land by hand. My siblings and I are the future custodians of this land. We are passionate and excited to embrace Agrisolar and all the possibilities it entails, like sheep grazing
40 under the panels. The Culcairn Solar Farm enables a sustainable and environmentally-conscious approach to agriculture. I am encouraged the New South Wales Government is committed to reducing 35 per cent of emissions by 2030 as set out in their Net Zero Plan Stage 1. The plan provides renewable energy will help the State reduce emissions, grow the economy and create jobs.

45 Not only is renewable energy, particularly solar, beneficial for the environment but it is one of the most cost-effective energy solutions available. With growing energy

demands across Australia and the State the Culcairn Solar Farm will help power our homes and businesses while reducing our carbon footprint. The Department of Planning's recommendations to approve this project is incredibly well-considered. I believe the Department's report addresses all issues and concerns raised by those
5 opposing the site. It is unsurprising that I am the first positive speaker today. The anti-solar group has circulated misinformation and induced fear around the project. Before today's public forum the anti-solar group contacted businesses and individuals in the community and threatened economic and legal retaliation if they publicly supported this project.

10 Consequently, community members have not been able to safely voice their support and excitement for this project. In October 2020 the Director of Planning referred to the Culcairn Solar Farm's battery and stated:

15 *They can meltdown like a nuclear reactor.*

This comment is highly inflammatory and I am disappointed the Director, in their position, could not provide a well-researched response to this project. During this process I believe some Greater Hume Shire councillors and staff have not acted on
20 any evidence or resources put before them but, rather, voted against the development based on their own personal opinion and bias against renewable energy. I believe this is evident in the materials produced by Council. The Culcairn Solar Farm will provide this community with an abundance of benefits. I believe this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we would be foolish to resist it.

25 Not only does the Department's report recognise the economic benefits to this region but the New South Wales Government also provides in their Net Zero Plan Stage 1 that renewable energy developments are incredibly important to regional areas. Employment opportunities within this community will grow. Our local businesses
30 will directly benefit by simply having more people travelling in and around Culcairn and Walla Walla. For me Neoen's Community Benefit Fund is one of the most exciting elements of the project. Culcairn and Walla will have an influx in available funds that we have never had before. The structure of the community benefit fund allows community members to have a direct involvement in the projects they wish to
35 see achieved.

Due to COVID Australians are travelling and holidaying regionally. I believe the projects addition of an observation deck and information facility will help generate
40 additional tourism. I support the Department's recommendation. I believe the Culcairn Solar Farm will provide lasting benefits to my local community and help New South Wales reach their climate targets. Think global. Act local. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Lauren. I want now to call Mark Fogarty. Good
45 afternoon, Mark.

MR M. FOGARTY: Good afternoon, Graham.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Mark, you've been allocated five minutes I understand.

MR FOGARTY: Yes. That's correct.

5 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Mark.

MR FOGARTY: Look, I will start off I'm not tabling this submission as a member of the Greater Hume community so I leave the IPC to put whatever weight it wishes on my comments. I'm not tabling this submissions as a prima facie objective to state
10 development on the Culcairn project on its merits. I leave this to the more capable advocacy of the community presenters and – and I've been listening this morning. I'm humbled by the passion and the strength of their response. I'm tabling this as a concerned observer on the basis that my observations might offer the consent authority with some additional lenders on which to contemplate this
15 application.

I present with a background in renewable energy and I'm currently undertaking some higher degree research in New South Wales energy transition and the social economic benefits to the res community. So I accept this is not a res community but
20 potentially it could be a res-associated project. Whilst it's early days it's obvious to – in the research process it's – it's obvious to me we've got two speed governance processes between a city-centric meta-governance planning regime, which I think mitigates against meaningful community inclusion, and more recently a more modern market-based approach advocated by the New South Wales Government
25 through its electricity infrastructure investment road map and Act which, on paper, promotes, in my opinion, the opposite.

I look forward to prosecuting and proving this conclusion right. To the purposes of this IPC community meeting my main observation is going to the inability by the
30 New South Wales Government policy, and in this case planning governance, to adequately protect good agricultural land. On observation I conclude the published EIS material that there was an abundance of enthusiasm from the developer and their advisors to conclude as below agricultural potential of this land. We've heard quite a bit about that from the community already. I don't believe the developer has
35 extinguished my concern as to the conclusion based available and – and the available science and good farming practice.

This failure of mine – my – mine should induce contemplation by the panel as to a more considered application of the ESD Principle of intergenerational equity. In this
40 regard, as highlighted by earlier speakers, we are plummeting towards 9 billion population on this precious planet by 2050. So for future generations what are we going to feed this population and what will be Australia's role. I appreciate this issue of incompatible land use has been at the centre of this development from day 1. I acknowledge the many intelligent arguments including today, both to and fro, that
45 have – that have already weighed into the prosecution of their concern and, most notably, neighbouring landowners and the leadership of the majority of the Greater Hume Shire Council.

The loss of available agricultural land is an acceptable strategy – tragedy associated with this development and the associated developments in the Greater Hume area, in total 2000 hectares of high quality farming land imprisoned for 30 years in the term. Short of – surely better locations, less arable locations paint a better
5 intergenerational message to a planet that must feed, as I said, 9 billion people by 2050. As recently highlighted by the Australian Farm Institute, in terms of policy and planning a key conclusion from research is the need for acceptance and defence of state-wide agricultural practices by Government agencies and industries. Many
10 conflicts are fostered by a misunderstanding of what constitutes a normal farm practice. This is a set of practices which must be informed by societal expectation and reinforced by planning guidelines.

The panel – the key issues at the centre of this development are stark and well and truly the subject of – of assessment and they cannot be divorced from the broader
15 Greater Hume largescale solar development landscape that have been eloquently advocated by the community commentators. The cumulative impacts, the over-development Jindera/Walla and the posed – proposed Glenellen, the contribution of this cumulative impacts of visual amenity and – and, as I’ve already highlighted, the – the demonstrable incompatibility of the development to agricultural land. So in my
20 mindset there is a distinct lack of social licence in New South Wales. The Government recognises that. It was certainly a centrepiece of much of the policy in the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act but – which is potentially a game changer and it does promote for a more equitable benefit sharing, stronger validation of the projects and their developers.

So the interesting question is how will it interface with a tick-box regime evident in the EPA Act 1979 and the myriad of planning instruments evidenced in the SEPP
25 Infrastructure 2007. Finally, on the development and material I think I go back to the point that was made earlier in the morning by Bill Schulz and, subject to the IPCs decision on consent, we need a much stronger concentration as to what the
30 measurable outcomes are going to be. The DPI has put in place schedule 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the consent conditions in their January ’21 assessment finding and recommendations. These need to be very tightly drafted and very measurable as to ongoing compliance and at the moment they are neither. Thank you.

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MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mark. We now move on to Rochelle Schoff. Good afternoon, Rochelle.

40 MS R. SCHOFF: Hello. Hello, Andrew and Zida and all who are listening and watching from home today. I am an immediate family member of the landholder of the proposed site and I’m speaking today because I am in support of the Culcairn Solar Farm and in favour of the New South Wales Department of Planning’s assessment report. I will keep this fairly straightforward. I have three main reasons
45 for supporting the Culcairn Solar Farm; climate change, combined agricultural and energy production and the economic benefits for rural communities. So, firstly, climate change and the environment. As I am sure you are well aware the intergovernmental panel on climate change has found that if we do not take drastic

action to halt global temperatures rising by 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next decade we will irreversibly damage the environment.

5 Reaching zero net carbon emissions globally is one of the most effective things we
can do to stop global temperatures rising. Reducing carbon emissions caused by
fossil fuel production and upscaling renewable energy is essential. As the
Department has assessed the environmental impacts of the Culcairn Solar Farm will
be minimal given that Neoen has designed the project to avoid causing long-term
10 significant environmental harm. The difference between environmental externalities
caused by renewable energy projects such as the Culcairn Solar Farm and the severe
and irreversible damage to global ecosystems caused by climate change are a matter
of scale. If we do not shift to renewable energy as soon as possible we will face a
much slower but much more certain destruction of human and non-human lives.

15 My second point refers to the debate surrounding agricultural and energy production
in the Greater Hume Shire. Those who oppose renewable energy will often point to
the preservation of agricultural land in the interests of food security but to say that
the Culcairn Solar Farm presents a competition between agriculture and energy is a
false dichotomy that has caught on in public debates. The local council voted against
20 the project on the basis that agricultural land was under threat. This is simply untrue.
Agricultural land is not at stake. If all four proposed solar farms in the Greater Hume
Shire are approved they will occupy approximately 2000 hectares.

25 Now, this may seem like an intimidating figure but it only amounts to 0.59 per cent
of the 335,000 hectares of land currently being used for agriculture in the Greater
Hume Shire. On scale the area of land being used for solar energy projects is
negligible in comparison to the remaining over 99 per cent of land still being used
solely for agriculture. Moreover the land being used for renewable energy
30 production can be combined with agricultural practices. We have already seen how
sheep can be allowed to graze underneath Photovoltaic panels and this provides them
with even better protection from the sun and the rain. In 2019 I travelled to
California to study sustainable agricultural practices that have been developed by
small holder farmers in Latin America.

35 I learned a lot and I'm excited to bring these ideas home with me. The solar project
that Neoen has proposed on my parent's farm is giving us the opportunity to
transition away from business-as-usual agricultural practices which are some of the
largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions after fossil fuel production. We're
40 looking to explore new integrated Agrisolar farming practices and to use our
remaining land to produce more environmentally sustainable – to produce food in
more environmentally sustainable ways. I'm excited to be a part of the next
generation of farmers that don't simply say, "Not in my backyard" but instead –
instead think globally and act locally by embracing new ways of working with the
land and our communities.

45 Finally, I support the Culcairn Solar Farm because of the direct and indirect
economic benefits to my local community. Neoen has committed to providing a

voluntary contribution to the Greater Hume Shire and community benefit funds for the towns of Walla Walla and Culcairn. Additionally, as Garth and Lisa from Neoen mentioned earlier this morning we will see new jobs created in the construction period with flow-on impacts to local businesses. To conclude, I agree with the

5 Department's report that the Culcairn Solar Farm is of interest to local and state-wide residents. The project site is optimal for solar energy production and Neoen's plan is consistent with State guidelines in addition to creating stable energy – a stable energy resource and economic benefits to the local community.

10 I hope sometime in the near future I can come home to see a brand new solar farm in the Greater Hume Shire and know that we as a community are part of the solution to climate change. Thank you for your time, Zida and Andrew, and I wish you all well with your decision.

15 MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you, Rochelle. Appreciate you talking to us today. I now move on to Karen Schoff. Karen, good afternoon. You've been allocated five minutes.

MS K. SCHOFF: Hello Andrew. Thank you so much. Well, welcome Andrew and

20 Zida. It's lovely to talk to you again. I am the wife of the landholder Jonathan Schoff. It has been a long day for everyone so I will just briefly touch on a few points of my written submission in support of the Department's assessment. My first report point is regarding the community benefit fund. As a former Greater Hume Shire councillor and current member of both the Culcairn and Walla Development

25 Committee I support the proposed modelling of the Neoen Community Benefit Fund. This is not a bribe but it also removes the limiting constraints of Council like a DA levy grants policy and budgetary outcomes decided by councillors.

The community benefit fund's structure involves both development committees.

30 Most members also sit on local committees and/or they know someone who does. They are the pulse of the community and the one thing every member has in common is their heart and passion for their community to thrive and grow. The community benefit fund structure, because it's flexible and grassroot-based, will assist the Culcairn and Walla Walla communities with projects that have been on their drawing

35 board for a while now. The community will be able to look at large projects that are substantial in nature from the Federal and State Government grants program which in some cases require 20 per cent community monetary participation. We don't have the funds at the moment.

40 Having the General Manager of the Greater Hume Shire at the last Walla Walla Development Committee Meeting sums up the VPA Community Benefit Fund well when he said:

45 *I think the VPA negotiated in relation to the solar farm in the Shire have been pretty good, pretty lucrative really. I don't want to offend anyone but if you are opposed to solar farms and you miss out on a VPA then it's a lose-lose for the community. But if you are opposed to solar farms and it gets approved and you*

get a few dollars from a VPA then at least the community will have something to show for it.

5 My next point is the – my professional capacity as a director of an apprentice/trainee
and labour hire not-for-profit organisation. I am extremely confident that Neoen,
with all the other solar farmers within the Greater Hume Shire, will be able to engage
local businesses and contractors throughout all phases of the project. Indicators that
I have seen show that the local business community are actively engaging with the
10 solar developers like Neoen within the Greater Hume Shire despite the opposition's
tactics. My final point in – is regarding Agrisolar and sheep grazing. This is one that
I'm most excited about. Neoen has successfully worked with landholders regarding
sheep grazing on many of their sites and I believe that this site will also be
successful.

15 I have learnt a lot as I've journeyed with my family through this process. Sheep
grazing under panels is new and innovative plus I believe one must think outside of
the box of normal traditional farming methods to achieve quantifiable success.
Together with Neoen, simply speaking, the sheep grazing operation will focus on
education and monitoring outcomes. I will divide my vision into three parts. The
20 first part is to employ local experts to help assist with trainees in cert-based
education. Part 2 is to work towards zero net 2030 and 2050 agricultural targets
focusing on regenerative farming practices for sheep grazing and Part 3 is to work
with Wiradjuri people, Landcare and agronomists to introduce indigenous grasses
into the areas like the wetlands for potential seed collection and enhancement of
25 potential wildlife corridors.

The excitement in researching and consolidating our business plan over the next year
is something we are all looking forward to. Thank you so much for listening to me
today. Do you have any questions?
30

MR HUTTON: Not for me thanks, Karen. I – just to say thank you for your time to
present to the panel.

35 MS SCHOFF: My pleasure, Andrew.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Well, thanks very much, everybody. We're going to take
the opportunity to break for some lunch. At this stage we are scheduled to return at
10 minutes past 2. So for those speakers in this last session, thank you very much
and we will see you at 10 past 2. Good afternoon.
40

RECORDING SUSPENDED [12.49 pm]

45 **RECORDING RESUMED** [2.10 pm]

MR HUTTON: Good afternoon and welcome back after the lunch break in the public meeting for the Culcairn Solar Farm. I would now like to call on Sharon Feuerherdt. Sharon, good afternoon.

5 MS S. FEUERHERDT: Hi, how are you going?

MR HUTTON: Good, thank you. Sharon, you've been allocated 15 minutes. Thank you.

10 MS S. FEUERHERDT: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

15 MS S. FEUERHERDT: Dear Commissioners, I pray that you listen. Forgive me if I speak poorly, the stress is immense. We are R24. I'm unsure why I bother speaking today. Nobody listens and I beat my head against a brick wall. All our concerns are sourced, researched and real, but no one is giving protection whilst ramifications at other sites become true. Where are the answers? Mitigation and measurable conditions. What happens when conditions are not met? What happens if we have
20 loss? How will we be compensated? The recommendation is subjective, favouring the New South Wales Government energy agenda with no real concern for neighbouring farmers or the true loss of agriculture.

25 The wording is skewed in a cut and paste document and New South Wales Planning and DPI, amongst others, have missed the mark with the potential rural impacts. We are one of the many New South Wales families struggling to deal with neighbouring solar developers and government bureaucracy that leaves no clear certainty as to people's future. New South Wales Planning is facilitating poor consideration of neighbouring farm businesses through allowing these companies to do as little as
30 possible with no ramifications of impact nor measurable – nor sufficient measurable conditions to which they must comply. This needs to stop now and developers must be shown that responsible projects are the only way forward.

35 It can be achieved and then people can sleep at night, including ourselves. Why do we have to defend and protect our exceptionally productive farming land, our way of life, our environment, our future and our children's future? We have agriculturally prospered whilst farming elsewhere has seriously struggled. Land here is a gift from God. The next story is no different despite the landowners' efforts to market it as poor to suit their application. When other areas lack to produce, our reliable feed
40 source is extremely valuable and strongly contributes to the sustainability of livestock production in our country. Such need is undervalued.

45 At this enormous size with a surrounding L-shape an increased impact is placed on two neighbours. This development is most definitely incorrectly placed. What we have endured for the last three years is deplorable. People have been rudely and incorrectly labelled as solar protestors and efforts to discredit our name were, perhaps, a tactic to avoiding appropriate consultation and to diminish concerns away

from the community and stop people speaking their views. We are quite simply neighbours exceptionally concerned about the risks of this massive sized development seeking responses to questions. We are not confident of being truthfully answered or receiving the appropriate action. People were so frustrated they just stopped asking.

With little ground, truth or evidence, why should we trust the marketing of this massive foreign company with a financial agenda set to increase their share price on the current Stock Exchange? The French would not allow this development on their productive agricultural land, so why here? This development is repulsive and way too huge for our agriculturally viable location. We have successfully farmed here since 1909 supporting five generations. Our success is proof that land in our area has consistent and reliable climatic conditions for productive cereal cropping. A sensible measured approach to renewables should form part of the energy transitioning in our country.

Arid marginal zones that will come from the New South Wales renewable infrastructure strategy must be the target for extremely large footprint development. This will protect food for the future. Small scale opportunities to support farmers' direct use is a more sensible approach where land use conflict exists. Sustainability is key. This is stupidity. Concerns of climate that may produce hotter and drier seasons with increased incidents of drought reflect an increased importance to protect strong agricultural land. I believe in a sensible medium for most things, but Culcairn Solar Farm has no fair, sensible medium besides that it does not need to be – is negligent from a planning perspective.

It misses the intent of numerous pieces of legislation and has no balanced outcome. The community fracture has been horrendous and opposes the aim of the Renewable Energy Action Plan to build community support for renewable energy. The cumulative impact of multiple development and the massive size of Culcairn Solar will, no doubt, see regret and anger towards renewable energy in our area. Many people now pass Winton on the Hume Freeway and say, "Wow, that's huge", without realising the development here will be eight times its size. Afterthought will be too late and changes must be made now. This development in its current form could start massive uproar towards large scale solar.

As neighbours with a view to all, we will ensure every respect is published – made public and those people involved with the development and approval of such will be referenced as being accountable. How can New South Wales Planning say that the amendment adequately responds to the concerns, to the loss of agricultural land, impact on native vegetation, Aboriginal heritage and local amenity, as the company states is its purpose? It is still massive and little has been alleviated. The landowners initially told us this development would be 400 hectares. Why did that size need to increase? Our family has quietly considered that on the primary landholders' large holding that 100 or 200 hectares of solar in the centre of their property could allow for mitigation and tolerance.

Four hundred is still huge, but 900 with a surrounding L shape is just ridiculous, intolerable and far too much risk. We sent options through – thought possible to the Department but achieved no response. Council also agreed to forward to New South Wales Planning our suggestions to achieve a more balanced medium, as can be seen
5 in the Department’s agency correspondence. For me proof of bias is confirmed where New South Wales Planning says the project is not inconsistent with the objectives of the 81 zone. This is worded backwards to facilitate their agenda. The worst is that the recommendation totally misses the LEP aims it contradicts, being to encourage sustainable primary industry production, to minimise conflict between
10 land uses and to maintain the rural character of the land.

The rural step and the ministerial direction are just totally forgotten. Permissibility may be allowed under the infrastructure step, but should we really just dump the rest of the law and its truth and intent? The protection of agriculture and the economic
15 benefits can both be achieved if we locate these massive developments out west on less productive land. We need not destroy one for the other. We just need sensible planning and infrastructure which is already in the process of occurring. And what of the massive number of objections? I feel that the government should just be truthful and tell communities that the government agenda will proceed at any cost, if
20 it be the case.

As far as I know, none are declined. It’s just ticking boxes, following process, but not truly considering what are the processes in place: giving a free ticket to ride for developers to do as little as possible. The large scale solar guideline objectives are
25 certainly not being met here. Many issues of constraint exist, particularly the land soil capability class and the fact that this land was potentially to be mapped as important agriculture land amongst other issues. The New South Wales DPI has not competently assessed the land regardless of their knowledge of the problems with land soil capability mapping. This land is not land soil capability class 4 and I
30 implore the Commissioners to read that section of the agricultural assessment properly as New South Wales Planning has incorrectly read it. And I will provide further information in writing.

I’m sick to death of that lie and I don’t believe that DPI have acknowledged that
35 classification as New South Wales Planning referred. The land use conflict risk assessment does not mention conflicting agricultural activities such as livestock with construction noise and cropping production with heat impacts. Our rear paddock in the L shaped section assigned to grazing crops with the location of our cows and sheep which during noisy construction in lambing and calving season could result in
40 death due to mismothering. Research exists and was provided with our area submission confirming that stress can impact the health, fertility and growth of livestock, but, again, no answers.

The landscaping plans defining vegetation as a minimum of two rows shows such
45 disregard. Without spacing or how many trees there is no comfort of alleviating any visual or heat impact. There is absolutely no way possible that within three years the miniscule number of tubestock trees suggested will be able to meet the Department’s

recommendation to minimise view. And what does that mean anyway? What happens at the end of the three years when they do not meet that requirement? This condition does nothing. It must be more precise. The land use conflicts will be exacerbated in the surrounding L shape in a hot, windy September/October when
5 crops can be thirsty and ingress and heat can result in reduced yield or death of our crops and significant loss.

Research is lacking on developments of scope. You cannot compare a 350 megawatt development to a one megawatt development. Even the Clean Energy Council
10 acknowledges heat concerns. There is research that shows heat extending 700 metres. Who knows what it will be in the surrounding design. It is incorrect for New South Wales Planning to say that a 30 metre buffer will ensure heat impacts will be negligible when there is no suitable vegetation screening at all in many areas. The locations of concern will be included in my written submission. The vegetation
15 screening proposed for this development is an absolute joke.

How can you say there would be no significant visual impacts on surrounding residents and some receivers and that the raw character and visual quality of the area will be preserved when there is minimal screening and nothing along Cummings
20 Road where residents drive every day? A fire recently occurred on the solar site at the rear of our property. We now see much greater risk. Under panels that day fire suppression could not have occurred. The 10 metre APZ would not protect us from embers and whirlwind. That creek is mapped as bushfire prone with limited access and will be surrounded by volatile fire risk of crops and trees. A bushfire emergency
25 management and operations plan is required to be considered as part of the approval process for such a massive development to ensure communities and towns are safe.

How can this be trusted to a developer? Brigades and RFS are not adequately consulted. To call RFS members to these fires would probably breach WHS laws.
30 How will electrical infrastructure and shorts increase our risk? Is lightening a concern with so much metal? And TransGrid alerted as to cockatoos chewing wires being a problem. Where is the correspondence from RFS on the website? We all remember the dire consequences of the Walla-Gerogery fires. I will never forget the conversations with those that suffered. The precautionary principle must be applied.
35 Stormwater at other solar sites is now a real issue. The flood study is concerned changes will occur. Will increased runoff from the site through our property via the waterway in front of our house increase flooding to our house and land?

Why should we incur the risk? We are truly worried that chemical leeching into our waterway could be seen in the future. We may need to call Erin Brockovich. This
40 waterway is an important area that we value due to an abundance of wildlife, birds and frogs that gives us the most beautiful peaceful amenity. It has been previously fenced in a riparian land care project. In our very first meeting we pleaded to avoid the area surrounding this woodland with this knowledge in mind. Again, no
45 consideration whatsoever. I consider the true environmental impact of this development as hypocrisy, destroying the environment to save the environment.

So many trees will be removed. I don't think there has been enough realisation of the ecological impact here. The bird is unreal. We have migratory birds come to the lagoon, including the impressive Brolgas, Spoonbill and Cormorant, Pelicans, Herons and more. And we regularly see many different animals such as Echidnas and Goannas. We know there are Swift Parrots and we believe we've seen a Curlew. Squirrel gliders locally exist and although we are not environmental greenies the words, "You don't know what you've got until it has gone" rings heavily in our ears.

At this time the only way to mitigate many issues and to truly keep the agriculture landscape alive from the very start would be to establish an earth bank to the height of the panels to screen the development. This could insulate noise, mitigate heat and avoid stress to livestock from the outset. Another suggestion we offered, but again no consideration in trying to do as a little as possible for the cause. Imagine you will spend almost every day surrounded by 900,000 solar panels with electrical infrastructure, a substation, a hazardous battery solar system and the industrial outlook. Imagine the place you once went to bed listening to the roar of frogs and have woken to the song of birds is now overcome with the high-pitched ring of 67 inverters and night time noise of a humming battery energy storage system.

Imagine driving in and out of your property looking at solar infrastructure every time we cross the road between our Roseview and Avalon properties opposite each other on Cummings Road. Imagine the next few years surrounded by construction dump and pile-driving that we've been told requires double the protection for workers yet no indication of how we as neighbours will manage this. Imagine the stress of our beautiful neighbours that have been given little choice but to move away from their beloved homes through this disgusting development. Stephen and I have built an amazing family home and the most resilient farm that we intended we would spend the rest of our lives with our family and be handed down through generations to our boys with a love of farming. But now I feel that my only future peace may be in my grave.

Now imagine the stress, sadness, frustration and health of the people within our family with what our future may endure. Stephen has the soil of this land in his veins and to move it would kill him, but for me it might kill me to stay. Either way we are screwed. Personally I would be ashamed to be involved in this development. The stress caused to families is disgraceful. I am comfortable we made the decision not to be involved. We will include further information in our written submission for your consideration as much of our concern is difficult to explain verbally and requires detailed explanation. Thank you very much for listening to me today.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Sharon. And I would encourage you to send through those comments as well.

MS S. FEUERHERDT: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Thank you very much.

MS S. FEUERHERDT: Cool. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Okay. We now move on to Neville Feuerherdt. Good afternoon, Neville.

5

MR N. FEUERHERDT: Yes, good afternoon.

MR HUTTON: Yes. You're allocated five minutes, Neville.

10 MR N. FEUERHERDT: Good afternoon, panel members.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

15 MR N. FEUERHERDT: My wife, June and I, live at Roseview on Cummings Road. We are located directly in front of the panels to be located on Cummings Road. We have farmed Roseworthy, one of the said properties requesting this development. We leased the farm for three years where we were – where we were able to turn a poorly managed farm into a profitable income of cropping hay and livestock grazing. They will tell you that they plan to run sheep under the panels. This is an absolute
20 joke. They got rid of all their sheep many, many years ago to combat the weed silverleaf nightshade. There is a land care article that verifies this, which I will attach to my written objection.

25 As our property actually – our front verandah of our house looks out on to Cummings Road the company has failed to meet my wife and I, even though they tell that all neighbours have been consulted in this process. In Neoen's report regarding item 4.1.1, organisation submissions, it states the proponent has taken extensive steps to involve the local community and neighbouring landholders and infrastructure will not be visible. Also in Neoen's report in item 2.3.4 regarding site suitability: that
30 the proposal is not highly visible and that natural screening occurs along Cummings Road. This is absolutely rubbish. The panels will be clearly viewed along Cummings Road and, once again, I will send in a photo of this in my written submission.

35 As the panels will be visible from the road, the glare from the panels will impact on the visibility of drivers. This is concerning as school children are picked up in front of that entrance to Cummings Road and other school buses use this as their major road between Culcairn and Walla. How is the company going to stop traffic from coming along Cummings Road? Neoen state that screening of an appropriate width
40 is proposed for sensitive receivers where there are views of proposal, however, they have failed to mention this for Cummings Road. And it too needs to be screened with visible dense trees and scrubs to ensure that the panels are not visible to road users and from our front verandah.

45 I am also concerned about the fire risk as the land is mapped as bushfire prone. I am concerned that a bushfire emergency and management plan, 8.3.5 for solar farms as the planning for a bushfire guide November 2019 in regards to building on bushfire

prone land has not been sufficiently or adequately considered. A fire will place many farming residents and communities at risk. This project is way too big. It will change the amenity of the whole area. Land values will decrease. It is quite clear that the government officials clearly undervalues farmers. I would like to point out
5 to you a few things. The clothing you are wearing today are a result of farmers providing the fibre. And what you have eaten today is the result of a farmer growing the food.

10 Taking away prime agricultural land for solar is extremely short-sighted. We have been through drought, floods, frost, fire, but we have never experienced financial hardship or received government handouts as this farm land in this shire enables you to diversify that it is able to have livestock and cropping. My wife and I have never, ever experienced such mental and physical stress before the development was
15 proposed. June now has high blood pressure as a result of this crap and this is an increased risk for heart attack or stroke. By not reading the fine print of the many concerns you are prepared to waste prime farmland, risk the mental and physical health, but put residents and communities at risk of fire to satisfy the energy agenda. Thank you.

20 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Neville. I appreciate your time this afternoon. Moving on to Patricia Feuerherdt. Patricia, good afternoon.

MS P. FEUERHERDT: Yes. Hi, how are you going?

25 MR HUTTON: I'm well, thank you. You've been allocated five minutes. Thanks very much.

MS P. FEUERHERDT: Okay. Thanks. Good afternoon, panel members. My name is Trish Feuerherdt. I am the owner of Orange Grove Gardens, a recipient to a
30 solar farm of similar size to this one that was approved four months ago within five kilometres of this project. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the neighbours that have been put through this ordeal. It breaks many and consumes way too much of their lives sifting through truths of the project. For the record, I don't believe anyone in this region is against solar. We are against the sheer size, disruption, removal of
35 agricultural land and the possible effects they will have on our local environment, economy and community.

From my own experience, I feel that this – is a high potential that you will approve this. So I ask the panel to rethink and make conditions of consent more vigorous.
40 The word “consultation”. For those who do not agree with the proposal, it has been a mere experience of rock up, advise, listen, walk away, tick a box and continue with the original plan. I ask to remove the word “consultation” and replace with “agreement”. Give the neighbouring community a voice that means something. Reduce the size. A cumulative effect should be based solely on the shire, not on the
45 whole State of New South Wales. Parameters that are realistically defined. What does substantial screening in three years really mean? What is acceptable dust, what is acceptable heat increase and for what distance? What is acceptable glare? Bomen

has had an identified glare issue. So what really happens here? And why if there is an identified issue is it not taken into consideration for all future projects?

5 Compensation: I believe a writer to the Department was advised that not everything can be verified. So how is anyone comfortable in approving these? If I went to the bank I would need to verify and justify everything to be approved. Why would such a proposal not be given the same vigour of due diligence prior to approval? And when things go wrong who is compensating the neighbours and the communities that ask these simple questions? What is defined as communities? What constitutes acceptable social impact? Not one of these proposals has had anything near a clean sweep in favour. If anything, they have all identified a huge divide. At what point is enough enough to constitute social impact?

15 These foreign companies did not build this country or these communities. It has been our generation's taxes, rates and sheer hard work. If they can wave a cheque book, sell a narrative and surrounding families, neighbours and communities are left divided and at a loss of to who really has their back in protecting their livelihoods. All farms are businesses. This is, and has always been a reliable farming community, not just because of land classification but because of reliable natural rainfall. This community has grown and is strong, not fading away over time like many. So I ask, you have the power to change and protect neighbours and communities, so why not make realistic, rigorous conditions with achievable outcomes.

25 This project will change the landscape and this community forever and the effects will be worn by generations to come. So, please, consider those that are going to really be affected by it. Thanks for your time.

30 MR HUTTON: Thanks, Patricia. Much appreciated. We will now move to Stephen Feuerherdt. Good afternoon, Stephen.

MR S. FEUERHERDT: Yes, good afternoon.

35 MR HUTTON: How are you going? Just letting you know 10 minutes. All yours.

MR S. FEUERHERDT: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Thanks.

40 MR S. FEUERHERDT: Dear Commissioner, I strongly object to Culcairn Solar. As we are a major landholder to this development we have a massive front on our east and south. I am a captain of the Culcairn South-West Rural Fire Service. As a captain, I have the responsibility to fight fire within the area. This proposed development is within the area that I am responsible for. The members of the
45 Culcairn South-West RFS and neighbouring brigades have significant concerns in relation to our safety, the safety of nearby residents and the safety of towns that are

near this development. In December 2020 a fire started on the farm Wattlevale and crossed back Back Creek moving generally east. This area is bushfire prone.

5 The fire entered the proposed development land. A number of RFS vehicles entered the fire scene via Wattlevale Road. The other vehicles travelled along an unnamed road that runs through the middle of the development. The fire was contained and extinguished in a few hours. The weather this day was hot and the wind was gusting. The fire conditions were dangerous and fortunately the fire was contained without
10 damaging anyone's homes. The fire was suppressed quickly due to a number of responding fire fighters and the access to the fire ground. The proposed development is over 900 hectares consisting of 900,000 solar panels in rows. Each row is connected to the next row by steel drive lines.

15 These drive lines prohibit vehicles being able to drive between the rows of solar panels. The development also includes a large battery storage site, hundreds of inverters and other machinery that generate, stores and converts electricity. The entire development is surrounded in chain mesh fencing. Should a similar fire be experienced either from a fire entering from an adjoining property or from a fire commencing within the development, access to this site is very difficult. I have
20 concerns that the chain mesh fencing and the rows of solar panels connected by drive lines creates a strong likelihood that fire fighters will be entrapped by this infrastructure which increased the risk of injury or death to fire fighters.

I have been advised that should a fire start near the solar panels water cannot be
25 sprayed directly on to the panels due to the risk of electrocution. The electrical inverters, large battery storage areas and other machinery create massive fire risk to fire fighters of electrocution. New South Wales RFS members in the area do not have access to breathing apparatus. Burning plastics, metal, solar panels, batteries, etcetera, give off toxic smoke that increases the risk of exposure to fire fighters. I
30 have raised these same concerns with the RFS and have been told that a fire plan will be required to be developed by Neoen. I am yet to see any such plan. Our brigade members have indicated that they are not prepared to enter the development to fight a fire due to the risk of entrapment, electrocution, exposure to dangerous chemicals.

35 This creates a huge risk to neighbouring properties and neighbouring towns. If a similar fire to the December fire impacted this development, by the time you had exited the eastern side of the development the size of the fire would be massive and would take a huge amount of effort to control. This would create a massive risk to the entire community and I have concerns that we could see a similar situation arise.
40 When fire started in the Walla tip, it escape and then severely impacted the township of Gerogery. I am concerned with weed management on this development. Poor weed management can directly contribute to the risk of fire.

45 As you can – as can be seen this year, summer rain caused Hairy Panic to grow rapidly. When Hairy Panic is seeding the stalks break off and the weed head rolls along the ground. Over the years we have seen this cause havoc on the roads by obscuring roads, filling in tree lines, surrounding homes and being stacked up against

fence lines. The use of chain mesh fencing around this development will cause Hairy Panic to be trapped inside the development and be packed in tight between the fence, solar panels and other machinery. This will contribute to the risk of a fire starting and spreading rapidly. By the way, Hairy Panic is toxic to sheep and does cause photosensitivity.

It has been recorded that this land upon which this development is proposed is underperforming and unreliable land. To attain the best results out of farmland the management of the land and timing of sowing crops is very important. It has been reported that class – that the land is class 4 land. The definition of “class 4 land” is limited ability for grazing and limited capacity for cropping. This land has been cropped every year for the last 20 years, so what’s limiting it? During ’15 and year 2016 we leased and share farmed part of this development property. From 2017 to 2019 we leased most of the land. These were years of less than average rainfall. We still managed to achieve good results in growing hay and straw. During this period the majority of New South Wales was drought-declared and produced little to no hay, grain or straw.

Thousands of tons of hay and straw were produced on this land and was purchased by the New South Wales State Government and was shipped to fire and drought-affected land in the north of the New South Wales. It has been argued that the land is waterlogged. If you get your crops into the ground at the right time waterlogging becomes less of an issue. To say that the land is no good is a complete lie. The farmers that surround this development are successful farmers that consistently produce high yielding crops. The Australian Government has an agenda to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is in support of renewable energy to the detriment of agricultural land.

The 900,000 solar panels will be manufactured in China. China has recently imposed sanctions on and stopped the purchase of Australian barley, wine, seafood, beef and lamb and now coal and iron ore. A large portion of the cost of this development will be spent purchasing solar panels from a country that doesn’t support Australia. Consider the lifespan of solar panels. When these 900,000 solar panels require replacement what will happen with them? We don’t have recycling options for decommissioned solar panels in Australia. The majority of the decommissioned solar panels in Australia are disposed of in landfill. Solar panels contain heavy metal such as cadmium, copper, lead, selenium and silver. The disposal of solar panels in landfill increase the risk of these heavy metals leeching into the environment causing adverse environmental hazards.

We are not against renewable energy, but strong consideration needs to be made as to where these kind of developments are placed, as well as the size of the development. Ruining productive agriculture land to generate electricity is ridiculous. Murray 2 is currently under construction and it’s touted as being the largest committed renewable energy project in Australia that will underpin a nation’s secure and stable transition to a low carbon emission future at the lowest cost for consumers. I am concerned that if Neoen’s project is approved that within a few short years it will be outdated

and underperforming. The sheer size of the development is staggering, 900 hectares, 2250 acres.

5 The top of the solar panels will be four metres off the ground. The land is in the area – it’s predominantly flat. The visual impact of 900,000 solar panels four metres off the ground will be monstrous. All the neighbours and landholders have invested a lot of money and time into their homes, land and farming infrastructure. Of the 11 surrounding houses four are practically new with seven older style homes that are well-kept and presented. Five of these have pools. None of these landholders are in support of this development. All of the landholders are adversely affected by this development. All of these landholders currently have beautiful agriculture outlooks. If this development goes ahead these views will change to a view over an industrial development.

15 Two of the landholders will have views of both this development and the Walla Walla solar development. It has been argued that the land values won’t be affected. How can you carry on if you got forced to live next to a massive industrial development? Would you? As a result of the development one of our neighbours has already sold his property and moved away. Another neighbour has entered in a negotiation with Neoen to purchase their property so they don’t have to live next to it. Both of these families have told us that they had no intentions of leaving the area until Neoen proposed this massive industrial development.

25 The Greater Hume Shire has identified issues and concerns with this development and it has voted to object to this development. In conclusion, we would ask the Independent Planning Commission to please consider the massive impact on our family and our lifestyle. Put yourselves in our shoes and consider what it would be like if you are in beautiful hypodescent farmland and then someone came along and wants to build a massive industrial development next to you with unknown impacts in terms of heat, water-shedding, fire risk, effects on land values and health risks. Thank you.

35 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Stephen. I appreciate your time. We will move on now to Paul Lowe. Good afternoon, Paul. You’ve been allocated 10 minutes.

MR LOWE: Good afternoon, Andrew. How are you today?

MR HUTTON: Well, thank you.

40 MR LOWE: Great. Okay. I thank you for the opportunity to talk today and to bring to you my concerns with this development. I’m a fourth generation farmer on our property, which was first settled by my great-grandfather in 1912. Our property lies directly east of the proposed Culcairn solar development across Weamera Road and we are also a neighbour to the already approved Walla solar development on our southern boundary across Benambra Road. The cumulative effect of these two developments totalling 1500 hectares, quite frankly, scares me. I would like to address several of my major concerns.

MR HUTTON: Excuse me, Paul, before you do, is your property known as R9?

MR LOWE: No, I think we're R13.

5 MR HUTTON: Thirteen.

MR LOWE: But we - - -

10 MR HUTTON: Yes. Yes, thank you. I can see R13. Thank you. I just wanted to place that on the map. So thanks very much.

MR LOWE: Yes.

15 MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR LOWE: Yes, that's fine. I think I will skip over the bushfire things, because I think that has been covered pretty comprehensively. But I agree with everything that has been said with it. Except to say that with the sheer size of these developments I am concerned that a fire started in one that it would lead to a massive fire front that could well impact our property. The land on the Culcairn solar development – is situated on is infested with a serious weed problem of silver leaf nightshade. This weed is incredibly difficult to control and is highly invasive as it has a small pea like berry that can be spread by birds dropping the seeds. I am, and I think quite understandably, high concerned that under this development it will become prolific and a massive seed bank will develop impacting our property. Hairy Panic has been spoken about a lot, but it's also a prolific weed which grows on summer rains. Hairy Panic is toxic to sheep, so it will not be able to be controlled by sheep grazing.

30 Neoen have stated that they will develop a weed management plan, but as neighbours who will be impacted by these weeds we would like to know precisely what that plan entails. We do not believe with the design of the solar rows it will be possible to have machinery work between the rows due to the connecting rods which track each row following the sun. A boom frame will therefore not be possible, while hand or spot frame would be impractical on a site of this size. I, like many others, am very concerned about the lack of studies on solar developments of this scale in regards to the heat they deflect, especially with two such large developments on two sides of our property.

40 It's only logical that 900,000 glass panels will generate substantial heat, the effect of which is clearly unknown. Any studies that have been undertaken have been on significantly smaller areas, so the comparison is really not relevant. There's virtually no screening down the eastern side of the development protecting us from the hot westerly winds on the development plans. The glare that a solar footprint of this size will be a problem to neighbours and this has become evident at the Bomen solar facility in Wagga Wagga. I am concerned on the effect of water-shedding off the panels has been totally underplayed. I note the appendix I, flood study within the EIS, and am concerned about its assumptions on impervious calculations.

Rain collecting on panels will lead to water runoff instead of infiltrating. A recent gentle 40 mill rain event on the relatively small 30 megawatt Corolla solar facility led to the tail-drains running a according to its neighbour. 900,000 panels – and I’m not too sure what size panels they’re using, but my calculations – I’ve used a two
5 metre by one metre. They well be bigger. I’m not sure. This equates to 1.8 million square metres of hard impervious material. One millimetre of rain falling on one square metre area creates one litre of water. A 25 millimetre rain event on 1.8 million square metres of impervious surface will lead to 45 million litres of water shedding off the panels. That’s 45 mega litres in just one relatively small 25
10 millimetre rain event.

This amount of water cannot infiltrate quickly enough not to lead to substantial amounts of water having to go somewhere. This is going to seriously impact neighbours’ properties. What amount of damage could a large storm create? This I
15 see is a major issue that had gained virtually no attention. Neoen have made much of their neighbour consultation. Yes, they have ticked the boxes by meeting with us on our properties. However, we’ve never been given adequate answers to these and several of our other concerns. We have a property near Walla Walla and use both the Weamera and Benambra Roads for access of machinery, as well as a travelling
20 stock permit to drive stock between the properties. We have voiced our concerns about the amount of traffic these roads will carry and the impact it will have on our access to our other property during construction, but have had no real answers as to this issue.

We have posed the question of insurance liability risk. If we inadvertently cause a fire on our property which then escapes on to the solar development Neoen simply state that they have their own insurance policy so that we are protected. However, with a 500 million dollar development adjacent to our property if we are found
25 negligent then our \$20 million legal liability cover will not go far. We cannot afford to insure ourselves against this risk and it leaves us very exposed. I am concerned with the agricultural assessment report and the number of sheep which has been
30 estimated to be able to run on the solar development. As a neighbouring sheep grazier I think that the expectation that 14,000 Wethers can be successfully run on a given area is wildly optimistic, especially with the management constraints
35 associated with operating machinery amongst solar panels to manage the pastures.

I’m concerned about the possibility of decreasing land values. Neoen state that there is no evidence to show land values are affected, however, several properties for sale near the proposed Jindera solar development have been unable to attract interest even
40 in a booming local real estate market. I am concerned that information contained within the EIS and subsequent reports is not being checked or so-called ground proofs. Just because it is written in a document doesn’t make it correct. For instance, when the researcher was spoken to doing a biosecurity survey along Benambra Road for Neoen what he was looking for, they replied “frogs”. It was a
45 hot summer’s day, so not likely to find many one would think.

Then they asked if we had seen a particular parrot as they didn't even know what it looked like. Surely it is the job of the Department of Planning and now the IPC to ground-proof everything in the proposal, not just to accept what the proponents say as gospel. I'm concerned about the decommissioning phase of the development.

5 There is an absolute – is there an absolute guarantee that the site will be fully rehabilitated to its former condition at the proponent's expense, or is it possible that they will be able to walk away through some loophole and leave the district with an environmental disaster? There are many more issues to consider, such as toxic waste leeching out of the broken panels throughout the life of the project and through its
10 decommissioning. Dust suppression during construction and who will monitor it?

Although Neoen downplayed the risk of – or adverse effects the development will have on neighbours, I would like to know who is going to make them accountable if this was to occur. Who, for instance, will make them accountable for any increase in
15 silver leaf nightshade in our property due to their negligence? If my land values do suffer due to the cumulative impact of two huge solar developments, what compensation should I be receiving? These types of scenarios we as neighbours would like to be protected from. Clear and measurable parameters need to be established to protect neighbours from any adverse effects forced upon them.

20 The planning of Australia's future renewable energy needs requires much thought and foresight. At the moment our energy policy seems to be determined by foreign-owned solar companies as to where they want to place these solar industries in the most convenient and cost-effective locations to them. Namely, under already
25 constructed transmission lines with no regard to high value productive agricultural land. Indeed, the Department of Planning seems to be complicit in aiding these developments as they are yet to reject any solar developments throughout the State. Climate change is a serious issue and closely linked to climate change is food security. As the climate change continues productive agricultural land areas will
30 diminish. It does not make sense to try and solve one problem of replacing coal-based energy with renewables and create another issue of losing prime ag land in the process of placing solar on such land.

The government has named three main renewable energy zones within New South
35 Wales, however, the Culcairn solar development is not even within 200 kilometres of the nearest zone. What is the point of setting up these renewable energy zones if the Department of Planning recommend a development so far outside these zones? The number of solar development proposals on prime agricultural land in New South Wales is growing daily. Eventually at some point in time somebody will say
40 "enough". It just makes far greater sense for these developments to be built out west where they will not impact high value land or neighbours.

Surely, this is a perfect opportunity for government to plan for a renewable future appropriately built in areas best suited to serve our nation's future energy needs, to
45 build a network of transmission lines with the capacity to future-proof our nation's energy requirements. If Singapore can build an enormous solar industry in Northern Territory and cable power 3000 kilometres then transmission line losses can

obviously be overcome. I believe both sides of this debate will admit that it has led to much fracturing in our community. Tensions are running high. People are being verbally attacked in the streets and in businesses. I heard just last weekend those opposing the development referred to as Luddites, people against development and progress.

Nothing could be further from the truth, as Australian farmers are world leaders in agricultural innovation. They are highly regarded and considered as some of the very best farmers in the world. The land in the Greater Hume Shire is some of the most reliable and productive farming land in the State. Land values have skyrocketed in the shire because it is recognised as such valuable farming land.

MR HUTTON: Mr Lowe, we're a little bit over time. I just might ask you to wrap up with some concluding comments, please.

MR LOWE: Yes, sure. I've just got one paragraph.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR LOWE: It has been argued that tensions will ease as solar developments are completed and begin operation. I, however, fear that with the cumulative impact of four large solar developments within close proximity of each other this will not be the case. Thank you for treating our concerns seriously and for placing agriculture as an important component when designing our energy needs of the future.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Paul. I appreciate your time this afternoon. We're now moving on to Bailey Raftery. Good afternoon, Bailey. You've got five minutes.

MR RAFTERY: Good afternoon, Commissioners Andrew and Professor Zada. I wish to lodge my objection to the proposed solar development. I currently work for Feuerherdt Pastoral on a full-time basis and live on a property directly opposite the proposed location of the solar development. Besides the vast area of agricultural land that will be removed this proximity raises grave concerns. Creation of the microclimate and wind temperature increases affecting livestock and crops, conflict with the existing surrounding agricultural operations and the waste of natural resources, groundwater and productive soil, impact of operating noise and dust, electromagnetic radiation and other health issues from living so close to the large scale electricity generating facilities and mental health, loss of food producing land.

The soils in this area are amongst the most productive in New South Wales. For over 100 years this area has been a significant and high quality producer of beef, lamb, pork, cereal and oil seed, grains, which has contributed to sustaining the Australian people and contributed to our country's global agricultural export and income.

Impacts upon the soil: Because of the solar panel rows farming machinery such as tractors and cannot access the ground. It would be difficult and labour-intensive to control the weed, insects and disease which can take over in these conditions and impact neighbouring agricultural operations, which are a serious threat and can be

toxic or harmful to livestock and constitute a significant cost to Australian agriculture each year both in terms of control and loss of productivity.

5 Following decommission of solar farms soil rehabilitation is predicted to be a long and slow process. Economists predict that it will take many years to rehabilitate the soil to become once again capable of sustaining plant growth, if ever. Increased fire risk: Electrical infrastructure is a major cause of fire in rural and bushland settings. A grass fire can have a devastating effect on crops and fodder for livestock. There is concern that the solar developments may not only be a source of fuel due to untended weed growth under the solar panels, but also be a source of ignition. Residents have been insulted by the offers for compensation which in no way reflect the impact that this enormous project would have on their property values and lifestyle.

15 The effect on the wellbeing and mental health of neighbouring residents is concerning. This has already been a prolonged sustained stress for many locals. There has been much anxiety caused through the proposal process, feelings of uncertainty, potential risk, loss of quiet and aesthetic rural surrounds, frustration of the process in carrying the burdens of neighbours' concerns and fears. Should the development be approved in its current location it will adversely impact the safety, physical and mental health of myself, my grandparents, uncle, aunty and cousins. I am concerned about the impacts on our health during the construction and operational phases. The construction period will produce air pollution predominantly by way of dust and this will impact our health and day-to-day quality of life.

25 The long-term impact on our physical and mental health are unable to be fully understood at this point. This uncertainty creates ongoing stress and in turn has an impact on our mental health. The increase in traffic and large trucks and machinery will place my family at risk as we travel to and from our home. The surrounding roads are insufficient to safely handle this type of traffic and the risk to our safety by way of fire threat is another point of unease and stress, posing another threat to our safety. How am I as a volunteer firefighter of Culcairn South-West Brigade meant to safely fight and control any potential fires? The rural amenity we have enjoyed for so many years will be replaced by an industrial landscape of solar panels, noise, lights and reflection.

35 The value of my grandparents' and uncle and aunty's properties will severely need to be impacted. Whilst I concede that there is a place for solar power generation in rural Australia I think it should be confined to sparsely populated regions and poor and non-productive soils. Semi-arid and desert type environments would be better situations for solar developments. Is this the best use of our limited food-producing land at a time when we face population booms and threat to global food security? Do not allow this international company and others like them to get away with destroying our prime Australian agricultural land in order to save themselves the dollars it will cost them to place these farms in uninhabited and barren landscapes.

45 Thank you for your time.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Bailey. I appreciate your time. We will now move to Matthew Hicks. Good afternoon, Matthew. You have been allocated five minutes.

5 MR HICKS: Good afternoon, Andrew and Zada. Nice to speak to you again. As you will recall, I'm one of the landholders for the project and I will be speaking in favour of it. I've also read the DPIE report and would like to say that I agree with everything they have written. I have three points I would like to discuss. They are as follows. Primary or cultural land. As you will both recall from the tour, I pointed out large areas of the crop that have been adversely affected by waterlogging. This trend continued throughout the spring and the areas grew in size. As a result, the yield of the cereal crop was well below the district average and came in around three tonnes per hectare.

15 This was caused by the crop completely dying out in some spots and the rest struggling to reach its potential. In comparison, the district average on better farmland was around five tonnes per hectare for most cereal crops with isolated areas achieving seven tonnes per hectare. 2020 was one of the best years ever for any farming activity locally and as can be seen by my yields I would say that mine was mediocre at best. In fact, over the last 19 years my average cereal yield has been around 3.5 tonnes per hectare, which is nothing to get excited about. This has only been achievable by applying lots of gypsum and lime over the years. The soil type is quite difficult to manage as a cropping enterprise and also in the low lying areas are prone to frosting in a dry year.

25 This example highlights that the DPIE assessment at class 4 is correct and can't be argued against. Also we are talking about Agrisolar which will give the land dual use. The agricultural production will still be there just in the form of meat and fibre rather than grain. Biodiversity: As you will have noted from the DPIE report some isolated paddock trees are to be removed as part of the project, which some people are not comfortable with. As you will have noted from the tour, the majority of paddock trees marked for removal are either dead or dying. The removal of these trees will not have a significant impact on the biodiversity of the site as isolated trees do not offer great habitat and are unhealthy due to being on their own and not in a plant community.

35 The plantings that Neoen are doing will increase the biodiversity of the site immensely due to the use of understory as well as taller trees which are native to the area encouraging more native animals and birds to come on to the site. Adding to this, supplementary plantings along watercourses will link up remnant vegetation and allow for several new wildlife corridors throughout the site. In my section of the project Neoen are carrying out a supplementary planning that I have been hoping to do myself since I purchased the property. I'm very excited to see this planning come to fruition. This particular area is where the culturally significant ring tree is located that will ensure its preservation for many years to come.

45 Fire: There has been a constant fear promoted about the increased risk of fire and also the safety of firefighters entering the site to extinguish a fire that may start.

- Early in 2020 to try and give some information out to people about this aspect Neoen organised a tour of their Numurkah Solar Farm and issued invitations to New South Wales Rural Fire Service and the local brigade, New South Wales Fire and Rescue as well as CFA. We had two people from New South Wales Fire and Rescue attend, along with a contingent from the CFA. The site manager took us for a comprehensive inspection of all aspects of fire prevention and mitigation throughout the site. It was noted by all in attendance that the perimeter was accessible safely using the internal road and also there was very minimal fuel across the whole site.
- Under the panels was kept down by sheep grazing and where the tree plantings were it was regularly mowed. Also the panels were set up in banks on a grid system and again they're accessible using the maintenance roads. There was also plenty of room and clear areas should the need arise to turn around and find somewhere for a safe refuge. There was also ample and accessible water located throughout the site. The area where the office, sheds and substation were located were surrounded by a gravel area making a very effective asset protection zone. We also viewed the site's firefighting equipment, which is well maintained and quite effective as a first response unit.
- On speaking with the manager, he indicated that if a fire started within a certain radius of the farm they would respond their equipment and crew to assist CFA with fire suppression. After completing the tour everyone commented that they would be more than happy to combat a fire anywhere on the site. I feel that having this development area will help to reduce the fire risk by giving us a chance to extinguish a fire more safely should one be in the solar farm where there has been mitigation measures employed that we don't see on normal agricultural holdings. In my opinion, if one did start inside the solar farm it would be relatively easy to handle with minimal risk for escape.
- Also if management was of the mind to allow the employees to attend fires nearby it will also help reduce the severity by having people arrive quickly as most local volunteer brigades struggle to get a crew together in a timely manner at certain times of the day. I've commented on this as I have had 27 years' experience with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, 10 of those years as a group officer. In closing, I would like to make a point that the benefits of this development will be felt for many years to come throughout the local wider community. It is an opportunity that rarely happens in our area and shouldn't be passed up. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions about the fire side of things I'm happy to answer them.
- MR HUTTON: I appreciate that, Mr Hicks. There's no questions from me. No questions. So thank you for your time. What we're going to do now is just have a short break and come back at 3.25. That will just get us back on the schedule. So a short break. At 3.25 we will be back on. Thank you very much.

45

RECORDING SUSPENDED

[3.07 pm]

RECORDING RESUMED

[3.29 pm]

5 MR HUTTON: Good afternoon and welcome back to the public meeting for the
Culcairn Solar Farm. Apologies for the slight delay. We're just getting some images
for the next speaker. I would now like to call Lynette LaBlack. Lynette, good
afternoon. You've got 15 minutes.

10 MS L. LaBLACK: Yes. Good afternoon. How are you today?

MR HUTTON: Good, thank you.

MS LaBLACK: Am I right?

15 MR HUTTON: Yes. You're ready to go. Thank - - -

MS LaBLACK: Can you hear me okay?

20 MR HUTTON: Yes. Ready to go. Thank you.

MS LaBLACK: Yes. Firstly, I would like to state my full support for Bill Schulz
from the Eunony Valley Association, and concur with everything he has said. As a
personally impacted family, we too are victims of obnoxious, large-scale solar
electricity generating work in the Eunony Valley, now forced to be lifelong sufferers
25 of non-compliant, offshore, shonky solar developers who are ripping off Australia
with the blessing of the disgraceful DPIE and their IPCN rubber stampers.

Not once has the DPIE or IPCN addressed the most terrifying issue to us, that of
toxic land and water contamination from the heavy metal leachate. Pale, fractured,
30 burnt, damaged, inferior aged panels present this to our superior quality,
irreplaceable food resource land. With only six per cent or less of Australia being
arable land, this contamination risk must be immediately addressed. A merited
professor, Zada Lipman, has an environmental law degree and has lectured at the
Macquarie University. She has not once addressed this glaringly obvious, serious
35 and irreversible risk of toxic contamination from Neoen's mass PV, instead, focusing
on what about the toxic lead, carcinogenic chromium and cadmium, which is
proven to leach from intact panels? What about those, panel members? Where is
your precautionary principle?

40 There appears to be an extraordinary gap in your knowledge and ability to truthfully
assess these insidious proposals. It is shocking to hear Nicole Brewer say that
Neoen's extensive ruination will supply energy for 130,000 homes. All of this risk
and vast ruination for 130,000 woke central, big city homes. How ridiculous. This is
disgraceful. And to quote Professor Jeff Curry AO, nuclear medicine specialist, CSU
45 Wagga Wagga, "This is illogical and beyond reason".

Please also note the total failure of the DPI Agriculture to truthfully and fully report the facts regarding sheep grazing at Neoen's Parkes solar electricity generating work. They have been silenced by the DPIE and forced to tow this dodgy line. They are not reporting sheep deaths or injury, increased flystrike or damage to solar
5 components – purely wool performance and bloodlines, thus, purposely excluding the detrimental impacts to the sheep. Why is this so? This is not truthful reporting at all, but fudged studies to enhance the glow of solar. And I've got a visual in relation to that, with Mayor Ken Keith, the mayor of Parkes, explaining about the sheep death when they were hung up by their wool on the rotating universal joints of the solar
10 panels. Can you see that?

MR HUTTON: Yes. We can. Thanks, Mrs LaBlack. Yes.

MS LaBLACK: Regarding the NGH, Nicola Smith claims of a heat island effect
15 study at Shepparton Solar, there has never once been one. Nicola Smith's reference of 30 metres – 30 metres negligible impact refers to a limited comment from Professor Greg Barron-Gafford regarding his incomparable studies on a minimal area of 13 hectares in Arizona. If you care to listen to the audio/transcript recording of his interaction with Integrity Fruit orchardist, Peter Hall, an extremely intelligent
20 gentleman with a degree in industrial physics and experience with solar factories and generating works in China, you'll discover that Barron-Gafford urges more research on this effect and admits that much larger scale would equal much larger heat island effects. Andrew and Zada definitely must clarify this. To date they have completely failed to do so for Walla Walla and Jindera, despite this information being available
25 to them from the Shepparton hearing. Why would that be?

The most interesting point worthy of note today is that the only supporting speakers come from the bribe sucked-in solar host families. Obviously, there is truthfully no
30 community support for this horror at all, and Neoen and the DPIE have no social license whatsoever. Now to the fun part. Dedicated to my wonderful dad: expert farmer, biodiversity and ecological protector, genuinely sustainable methods, productively farming wonderful, rich, uncontaminated land for decades, classed as wasteland by this stupid DPIE. He'd be rolling in his grave to see this horror and the heartbreaking torture wrought on his much loved daughter, grandchildren and great-
35 grandchildren. The BNS shindig:

*I got this invitation to the BNS shindig. I was bordering on delighted, but I should have learnt the jig. This darn lot, with their rubber stamped rot, they sure have failed the equation. They've got no class, but rehearsed their farce, full of fakeness and irritation. What's plain to me, this stuff you see, has
40 many a foolish error. While lies are the norm, they've got no form. They couldn't have been less fairer. They've pedalled their plot, with stokes on the trot. It's useless to deny it. We've seen their res plans with no toxic bans. How the hell will Australia survive it? This Independent IPC has issues with their charter you see. They've got themselves all pickle potted, forgot their Is, and their Ps aren't dotted. It's criminal here just what they're doing. They've
45*

joined Ken's cabal while we're all spewing. Now, IPCN, with my new Troy-baby friend, is calling me names - - -

5 MR HUTTON: Excuse me, Mrs LaBlack – Mrs LaBlack, I might ask that you just direct your comments back to the project, please.

MS LaBLACK: Yes. I'm – I'm – I'm getting there. I've had - - -

10 MR HUTTON: I ask that you focus on the issues that are relevant - - -

MS LaBLACK: Yes.

MR HUTTON: - - - to this particular project.

15 MS LaBLACK: I – yes. Well, I am because Troy has featured a lot in this issue.

20 *Now, IPCN with my Troy-baby friend, is calling me names like "stakeholder". Why on earth does he state, when he's failed to communicate that he's all knowing and fancies his folder. My new mate, Troy, with his fantasy ploy, has forced his dooming direction. He reckons it's grand because he can command all these poor folks without an election. Unity he'll be claiming, espousing perfect peace accord.*

25 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Mrs LaBlack. I might – I might ask that you – you just direct your comments – it's most useful if you talk to the issues that you have with the project or the proposal - - -

MS LaBLACK: Yes. That – yes. That's exactly right. I'm doing that.

30 *Unity he'll be claiming, espousing perfect peace accord. He'll babble, he'll fake it, fudge and inflate it, ensure he has the last words, but I tell you what, we've had enough of this rot. His damnation's going to rest with the Lord. Oh, how I do wish you'd listen to this and take note of impacted people, but it seems you're too proud, your baloney is loud, you've got yourself stuck up on a steeple. Hells bells, what's that smell?*

35

MR HUTTON: Mrs LaBlack, we might – we might leave it there. It appears that we're not - - -

40 MS LaBLACK: No. No, no, no. I - - -

MR HUTTON: We're not focusing on the key issues that you might have with respect to - - -

45 MS LaBLACK: Yes. I'm - - -

MR HUTTON: - - - this proposal.

MS LaBLACK: I will – I will. I’m getting to that bit.

MR HUTTON: If you wouldn’t mind just directing your comments to that. That’s
5 what’s most useful for us in these – in these forums, is to hear from you or give you
the opportunity to talk to us about your issues on the project, rather than - - -

MS LaBLACK: Yes. That’s right.

MR HUTTON: So if you wouldn’t mind - - -
10

MS LaBLACK: I’ve got very big issues.

MR HUTTON: - - - directing your comments back to that, please. That’d be
15 appreciated.

MS LaBLACK: Yes. Well, this – this speaks about my health issues and the
impacts of these developments.

20 *Hells bells, what’s that smell? So much more than my stress gastritis. The
DPI’s got it wrong. This plan has a pong. Neoen’s wrought is suckeritis. I’ve
just heard of this thing, it sure has a ring, crapulence is the latest pleasure.
Indulgence its cause, there must be a pause in approving PV without measure.
Woke city folk can’t link white to the yolk. They don’t know their food grows in
soil.*

25 MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you, Mrs LaBlack. We’re going to - - -

MS LaBLACK:

30 *Just wait till they taste it. They better not waste it - - -*

MR HUTTON: We’re going to move on. Thank you for your - - -

MS LaBLACK:
35

MR HUTTON: Thank you for your presentation. It’s most useful in this forum
where we get – have a direct – or hear directly on your issues around the project and
we’d appreciate if – if you could do that going forward. We – we’d certainly
welcome any submissions that you might want to make to the panel on your key
40 issues. We’ll move forward now. Thank you. We’ll move to Casey Feuerherdt.
Casey, good afternoon.

MR C. FEUERHERDT: Afternoon. My name is Casey Feuerherdt and I’m nine
45 years old. I live at Avalon, right next door to where the solar farm might be. My
nanny and poppy also live in front of where the solar panels are going to go and it
will go right around our farm. We’ll have to drive past it every day and it will look
very bad. When nanny and poppy take me to school they’ll see the solar panels in –

every day at the end of their track. I've seen solar panels in real life and they don't look good for other people.

5 I'm in the fifth generation of our farm and I want to live and work on this farm when I get older. I like to ride my motorbike around the farm helping dad move sheep and cattle, our stock, especially when there are lambs and calves. They – they will be right near the solar panels. I worry that the animals might be scared because of the loud noises when it is getting built and the panels might make them get sick. If cows and ewes leaves their calves and lambs, they might die. If they get scared, they
10 might get sick. It might get hotter in our back paddock and our crops might die if they get too hot. I think it might change if we get rain or not. If there is a fire where – where the solar panels are, no one can go in there and stop it. It might come onto our place and burn our crops and our house. We had a light fire last year and it was very scary, but dad put it out on – in the paddock before it got to our place.

15 I think the solar farm will affect my future of farming, and if bad things happen, it is not fair for us to deal with them. We could get sick and have garbage all around us. My family has done a lot of work on this farm, and they're going to ruin it by putting a solar farm next door. I think all the birds might fly away. What will happen to the
20 echnidas, scorpions, and our frogs in the dam and all the other animals? All the kangaroos will come onto our place and we'll have to deal with them. We are lucky because on our farm we have made heaps of amazing hay and crops to feed the animals. We sent the hay to drought and burnt out people when they had none. We had – we made a lot of hay and grain on the solar farm land when dad was farming it.
25 It should not have solar panels. We are making such good hay, animals and crops to sell for food, but when there is solar panels next to them the food might not be good. It makes my mum and dad really sad about the solar panels. Some people have been very mean. Thank you.

30 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Casey. Thanks for your time this afternoon. We'll just move on now to speaker 23, Jonathon Schoff. Jonathon - - -

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Hello. Yes.

35 MR HUTTON: Hello, Jonathon?

MR J. SCHOFF: Giddy. Jonathon here. Am I on?

40 MR HUTTON: Giddy – giddy, Jonathon. Yes. You are. You've – you've been allocated 10 minutes. Thanks, Jonathon.

MR SCHOFF: Thank you, Andrew and Zada, for hearing me. I think I go for more, like, five.

45 MR HUTTON: Sure.

MR SCHOFF: Unless you've got questions for me. Yes. So, look - - -

MR HUTTON: No problem. Take – take whatever time you need in that allocated time.

5 MR SCHOFF: No worries. Well, thank you for your time and this opportunity to speak in favour of this project. I'll be sharing some of my written submission for you today. As you're aware, I'm one of the owners willing to lease my land to Neoen for the proposed Culcairn Solar Farm. I believe that this project will be significant in its benefits, not only to my local community, but also to the wider community of New South Wales, Australia and, indeed, the world, uniting us in
10 reducing carbon emissions and tackling the changes needed to produce renewable energy.

I appreciated your time and professional manner when you visited my farm to inspect the proposed site. I'm confident to say, after my family has farmed this land for over
15 100 years, it is well suited for the agrisolar operations proposed. This land has minimal paddock trees due to continual farming. This land is flat, low lying, prone to waterlogging and frost. The RU1 class 4 classification is certainly a correct assessment.

20 Regarding the critique of my land for this project, the narrative for me has never been how successful my land is or who might be the better farmer. The narrative for me is this is a legitimate – legitimate business opportunity. I have been vulnerable, as the landowner, to open my land for critique by my community as a state significant site. I'm saddened by the way some of this critique has been conducted in
25 this community. I'm also heartened by those who have been respectful in this process and I'm excited with those who'd like this project to proceed. Most importantly, my family and my children who will inherit my land, I want them to be part of the solution to make their world a better place.

30 It was in the late 70s when I was about eight years old, still getting around in my flared jeans, getting caught in my pushbike chain, when Worklink came and built the huge electricity towers running right through the middle of our farm. Only wearing Stubbies short shorts and Volley sneakers, these shirtless men would build and climb these high towers. I cannot recall seeing any hard hats or safety harnesses. High vis
35 was something the world had not invented yet. When I asked the question why the tower's being built on our land, my father, now in his 80s, shared a story about when his parents, back in 1952, first connected electricity to the farm house.

I quote my father: "Dad and mum connected electricity to the house when I was 13
40 years old, and when I turned the light switch on for the very first time and watched the light bulb glow and fill the room with light I stood there in wonder. The TransGrid powerlines have to run through our property to help another community have electricity, just like we can. Why should we stand in their way? We need to help the wider community as well". I believe the value my dad taught me right from
45 a youngster was looking outside of my own needs and looking at the needs of others will be necessary to solve some of our global problems. My family and I have farmed around the towers for over 40 years, knowing that although it was no direct

benefit to us, it was beneficial to people further away. We are not unique in having TransGrid powerlines running through farming land, but I feel privileged that we could, 40 years later, benefit from the TransGrid powerlines across my land in a legitimate business opportunity.

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In finishing, I would like to share – a highlight of all the studies taken on our farm was watching Wiradjuri people walk country and talking to them about our land. Their wealth of knowledge and passion to share their knowledge with – with us was inspiring. One comment that resonated with me that confirmed my excitement for this project was from a Wiradjuri person who said, “This project will be good for the land. It will allow the land to stop and breathe. It will allow healing to occur.” This history is now written down for generations to come, and I am humbled and honoured to be part of this history as joint custodian of this land. Thank you for listening. Jonathon Schoff.

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MR HUTTON: Thank you, Jonathon. Appreciate your time this afternoon. Okay. We move now to the next speaker, Tim Paramore. Good afternoon, Tim.

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MR T. PARAMORE: Good afternoon.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Good afternoon, Tim. You’ve got allocated 10 minutes.

MR PARAMORE: Very good. Thank you.

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MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR PARAMORE: I’m an economist – a private economist. I’m also a landholder, the other side of Walla from these projects. So today I’m – I’m not really talking about the proposal. I’m just talking about the practicalities of establishing pasture and grazing a solar – a solar area – a solar panel area. In reaching these questions I’ve sort – I’ve been to Parkes and looked at – at the sites there. I’ve been to Winton and had a look around there; that’s being built, Glenrowan West. So my experience was much more encouraging than I thought. So the sort of questions that I’ve come up with for Neoen: “What pasture species will be desirable under this sort of system?” Obviously a perennial mix which is winter active and summer active. Something that might last seven to 10 years.

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We then actually discussed when the pasture would be sown, the practicalities of how we would establish it. So the big question was: “Will there be adequate room in order for a farm to be able to work machinery across – between the panels?” The site I looked at at Parkes had none of the cross-connecting rods and was up to 11 metres between panels. So that’s plenty of room for machinery, a tractor. They’d actually been using slashers and different things to control the weeds. So that means that – I’ve discussed it with Neoen, they do need to look at the design of these connecting rods and whether they can be temporarily removed, but it’s just an engineering problem. If that’s the case, then it goes on: “Will it be possible to

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spread fertiliser, spray with herbicides/insecticides? Will this affect the panels?"
The answer is probably all that's overcomable.

5 "Will the areas be fenced off?" So what some of these blocks – you know, the – the
block we looked at at Parkes was 300 hectares. A farmer needs to be able to control
the area in which he grazes the animals, graze it for a short period and then move
them on, and that's the only way we can get – stop overgrazing. So that is another
point that I've put to – to Neoen to address. And also water is obviously a big issue
10 – whether they are prepared to put an adequate number of troughs to allow for this
rotational grazing system.

There is a maximum height that the pasture can grow to, so that the panels are not
shaded. We experienced that probably a metre was – was the max, and so this can be
maintained with – with sheep. And are sheep really the only thing you can graze?
15 Well, it – it seems that they are. You can sort of perhaps go to alpacas or those sort
of animals, but no larger animals. So I was quite encouraged in looking at these
other sites and doing this research. It is apparent with, you know, good collaboration
there's no reason that we can't get satisfactory dry matter production for ruminant
animals. And it did strike me that the – the farmer is important to the solar – well,
20 the – the solar panel company because both sides need to have good maintenance,
and the farmer is able to maintain and stop that shading that could occur with the
panels.

We didn't have any negative feedback about the animals. They all – we saw sheep
25 under the panels. They were quite happy. And the thing that I was particularly
interested is that we would be able to re-establish pasture that – we can get – they're
talking of running quite a lot of sheep across it. We can't do that unless we can
establish reasonable species and maintain them and maintain weed control, and so
that would address a lot of issues if we can do that satisfactorily. That's about it.

30 MR HUTTON: Thanks, Tim. That's appreciated. Quick – a quick question for you
before you go - - -

MR PARAMORE: Yes.
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MR HUTTON: - - - if I may. The – the information provided suggests that the – the
grazing of sheep could achieve somewhere near 80 per cent normal productivity.
What would your view be on that?

40 MR PARAMORE: Well, I think if you can carry out these practices, that may be
possible. As I understand it, the panels take up 20 per cent of the area, so if you've
got the other 80 per cent available, then it seems possible that that figure of 80 per
cent then is not impossible.

45 MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR PARAMORE: So it's an interesting question.

MR HUTTON: Yes. Thank you. I just took the opportunity to ask that, given your experience.

5 MR PARAMORE: Yes. Yes. So, look, it probably depends what you're trying to do. It's obvious that you've got to run dry sheep, and you don't want to have ewes and lambs and things – breeding animals in that situation.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

10 MR PARAMORE: But I think with good management you probably can go very close to that.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Great. Thank you. Appreciate your time, Tim.

15 MR PARAMORE: Okay

MR HUTTON: Thank you for talking to us this afternoon. Okay. We'll move on to the last speaker on our schedule today, Joshua Feuerherdt. Good afternoon, Joshua.

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MR J. FEUERHERDT: Yes. How are you going?

MR HUTTON: Well, thank you, Joshua. You've got five minutes. Look forward to hearing from you.

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MR FEUERHERDT: Right. Thank you. Dear commissioners, we are strongly against this development. This development will be an eyesore for our family and surrounding neighbours and we do not want to be stuck with the mess to be cleaned up in 30 years' time if the developer goes – disappears or goes broke. This family have grown unbelievable crops for many years and we do not want our crops suffering from the proven heat effect that will come from these panels. The research says we need to consider the scale and geographic location and more study is required, but most confirmed that vegetation around solar farms will mitigate the heat effect.

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We grew unbelievable crops on the site land – the site land when we leased it. The heat of these panels would cause our crops to die off in the struggling dry here, especially as there is no tree line or mitigation proposed to overcome increased heat, which research confirmed can occur up to 700 metres. There is absolutely no understanding of how heat impact would affect our crops with the L-shaped development surrounding our farm. Who knows if the heat could be felt for kilometres from the massive size or if the heat is multiplied by the surrounding shape. Nobody knows. The L-shape needs to be removed, the development be much smaller and have many trees to mitigate the heat.

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I also have massive concern about this development, as I'm a member of the Culcairn South West Fire Brigade. If a fire started in this development, there would

be no stopping it until it gets to the other side. All – all close – all close by towns would need to be evacuated because of the toxic fumes and hazardous chemical battery storage systems. I have seen enough destruction from fires last year when I helped remove a deceased firefighter from the Green Valley fires when their truck
5 was flipped over. This was traumatic and I never want to witness anything like it ever again. There is no excuse for increase – the increase in the fire risk danger to firefighters and neighbours. They should not be the ones to suffer from that if a fire occurs.

10 We had a fire last year along the back creek that was in the development site, and the back creek is fire prone and heavily treed restricting access. All this area along the back creek is mapped as being bushfire prone, and my house at the property
McMurchie near the treed area will be much greater at risk. I don't believe that the NSW Rural Fire Service has responded to this development with consideration,
15 and cannot see my – any response from their office regarding Culcairn Solar Farm in the documentations on the NSW Planning website. The minutes of the Numurkah fire – fire meeting are not realistic, as they say we would need to have a meeting with the site manager if there is a fire. Where time is critical, especially on a hot and very windy day, this could result in disastrous outcomes.

20 Our local brigade has been told that due to the workplace health and safety issues of entrapment, electrocution and toxic fumes that they will not enter this development. Again, the neighbours are at greater risk. A 10 metre clear zone can easily be breached with embers and wind created in fire. We don't even know if it's safe to
25 wait on the outside perimeter for a fire due to toxic fumes that we may breathe in. Rural fire brigades don't have the breathing apparatus.

I also believe that this development is not in the right location. I believe the development should be put in an arid environment that will not affect anyone and is
30 not classed as croppable country. All of my friends, many whom work with agriculture, and shearers and contractors and farmers, believe that this solar farm is – is the wrong thing to do in this area. I think everyone – I think everyone will be disgusted in how big this development is on the great quality farmland that will be wasted. Thank you.

35 MR HUTTON: Thank you, Joshua. Thank you very much. That – that brings us to the end of this electronic public meeting this afternoon. Can I just thank everybody who made themselves available and took the time to present and be part of this process. Both Zada and I have – have certainly appreciated your – your input. Just a
40 reminder that, in the interest of openness and transparency, a full transcript of today's meeting will be put on to the commission's website in the next few days. I just want to reiterate that the commission will be accepting written comments from the public up until 5 pm, Tuesday the 9th of March. That's next Tuesday at 5 pm. And as we've indicated earlier, we would certainly encourage you to make a submission if
45 you felt that you would like do that. You can submit your components using the "Have your say" portal on our website or by email or by post.

At the time of determination the commission will publish its statement of reasons for the decision, which will outline how the panel took the community's views into consideration as part of this decision making process. For now, though, thank you very much for watching the IPC electronic public meeting on the proposed Culcairn Solar Farm. From all – all of us here at the commission, enjoy the rest of your day, and good afternoon.

RECORDING CONCLUDED

[4.00 pm]