New South Wales Government
Independent Planning Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: POTTINGER WIND FARM (SSD-59235464)

DEPARTMENT MEETING

PANEL:	RICHARD PEARSON (CHAIR) MICHAEL WRIGHT SARAH DINNING
OFFICE OF THE IPC:	JANE ANDERSON GEOFF KWOK
SPEAKERS:	NICOLE BREWER TATSIANA BANDARUK JESS WATSON
LOCATION:	Zoom videoconference
DATE:	10:00AM – 11:00AM MONDAY, 26TH MAY 2025

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR RICHARD PEARSON: Here we go. Hello, Nicole and team.

MS JESSICA WATSON: Hi, everyone.

MR PEARSON: Great. So hi, everyone. Have we got everyone who's attending from the Department, Nicole?

MS NICOLE BREWER: We do, yes.

MR PEARSON: OK, terrific. Let me just begin with an opening statement. So before we begin, I would like to acknowledge I'm speaking to you today from Yuin land, and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all the lands from which we virtually meet today and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Pottinger Wind Farm, SSD59235464, currently before the Commission for determination. The applicant, Pottinger Renewables Pty Limited, a joint venture between AGL Energy and Someva Renewables, proposes to develop a 1,300-megawatt wind farm located approximately 60 kilometres south of Hay within the Hay Shire and Edward River local government areas in the South West Renewable Energy Zone.

The project involves the development of up to 247 turbines with a maximum tip height of 280 metres, a 500-megawatt battery energy storage system connection to the Project Energy Connect transmission line, which is currently under construction, and other ancillary infrastructure. My name is Richard Pearson. I'm Chair of today's Commission.

I am joined by my fellow Commissioners, Sarah Dinning and Michael Wright. We're also joined by Jane Anderson and Geoff Kwok from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interest of openness and transparency and to ensure full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded, and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website.

The meeting is one part of the Commission's consideration of this matter and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its determination. It is important for the Commissioners to ask questions of attendees and clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you're asked a question and are not in a position to answer, please feel free to take it on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which we will then put up on our website.

I request all members here today please introduce themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure they do not speak over the top of each other to ensure accuracy of the transcript. So thank you for listening to that opening. We will now begin.

We actually have an agenda which we circulated to the Department prior to the meeting, which starts with Department introductions, and then a brief overview from the Department of its assessment of the project. So over to you, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Thank you, Chair. Good morning. My name is Nicole Brewer. I'm the Director for Energy Assessments at New South Wales Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, and I am here today with my colleagues Tatsiana Bandaruk, Team Leader, and Jessica Watson, Senior Environmental Assessment Officer.

Today I will provide a brief overview of the key assessment issues and focusing on those that are in the Commission's agenda, and the key reasons for the Department's recommendation to the Commission to approve the project.

Next slide, please. So to give a little bit of an overview of the strategic context of the project, it relates to energy generation in New South Wales, and that's because all coal-fired power plants in New South Wales are scheduled for closure within the next 20 years. So this project would assist in providing up to 1,300 megawatts of large-scale renewable wind energy generation to meet the increased electricity demand, and that's consistent with New South Wales legislation and policies to reduce emissions.

The project's located in the declared South West Renewable Energy Zone, and it would connect to the approved Project Energy Connect transmission line. So that line's currently under construction, and some sections, such as the connection between South Australia and Buronga and the Buronga substation, have been completed, and works at the Dinawan and Wagga substation and the remaining portion of the line are continuing.

There are 10 other state-significant renewable energy projects within 25 kilometres of the project site, and that includes three adjacent proposed wind farms. And that's the Plains Wind Farm, Bulawa Wind Farm, and the Booroorban Wind Farm, and these projects are shown on that slide.

So the Department considers that the site is suitable for a wind farm and has a high wind resource. The area surrounding the project site is sparsely populated and it has limited neighbours, but also have large land holdings, and the project's consistent with the Wind Energy Guideline.

The project would provide flow-on benefits to the local community, including up to 900 construction jobs and up to $1 million in contributions annually to Council and First Nations groups, and broader benefits to the state through injection of $2 billion in capital investment into the economy.

So if approved, this would be the third largest wind farm in New South Wales by megawatts. The wind farm's been designed to minimise potential impacts, including locating turbines and associated infrastructure within areas that avoid

threatened ecological communities, and reducing the amenity impacts to the landscape through design, whether it's in an area of fewer neighbours and having neighbour agreements, which has significantly reduced the potential for visual impacts.

Next slide, please. In terms of community engagement, the Department exhibited the EIS in June last year and received 158 unique submissions, and of those, 83 objected and 75 were in support. It's worth noting here that no objections came from people residing within 15 kilometres of the project site. The majority of objections, that was 77 submissions, came from people living over 50 kilometres away, and a third of those actually came from interstate.

So the most common matters raised in those public objections were biodiversity impacts, impacts to agricultural land and the farming community, waste management and decommissioning, energy security, including concerns about the efficiency and reliability of renewable energy, and socioeconomic factors. The submissions in support noted the benefits of the project, including its alignment with state's objectives and contribution towards the renewable energy transition and a sustainable future, site selection, including the strategic siting of the project to minimise biodiversity.

The Department also sought advice from 20 government agencies and received submissions from the two host Councils, Hay Shire and Edward River Councils, and comments from Broken Hill City Council. None of those Councils objected to the project, and the Department also visited the site.

Next slide, please. So I'm now going to talk about what we consider to be the four key issues for assessment, and also the matters identified in the Commission's agenda.

Next slide, please. Regarding energy security. So the Department considers that the project is consistent with the relevant national, state and local policy documents. They all highlight the need to diversify energy generation mix and reduce carbon emissions intensity of the grid while providing energy security and reliability.

The project, as it's proposed, would have a generating capacity of up to 1,300 megawatts, which is sufficient to power around 593,000 homes per year, and it would save approximately 2.28 million tonnes of greenhouse gas annually. This would assist New South Wales in achieving the emissions reduction targets of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

The project has a battery energy storage system, or BESS, with a capacity of up to 500 megawatts or 2,000 megawatt hours. So that would allow the project to store energy for dispatch to the grid when the wind isn't blowing, or during periods of peak demand, which increases the grid stability and energy security. The project's on land where development's permissible with consent under the transport and infrastructure set. The project's also located –

MR PEARSON: Sorry, Nicole, I was just going to say, are you OK to take questions as we go?

MS BREWER: Yeah, I'm happy either way. Sure.

MR PEARSON: So just a question on – so they have access rights to the transmission network, but not for the capacity that they're proposing. So I think it's a 1,300 megawatt, and they've got a 30-megawatt connection approval. So question, why do they need that excess capacity, if you like?

MS BREWER: Thanks, Chair. So that is a question that we asked of the applicant. They may choose to stage the project to meet the access that's granted. The additional capacity also allows it to optimise the layout and the turbine choice. They may choose to absorb the project losses by installing more than the proposed access capacity. They might choose to maximise the use of the energy storage, and it may be, although it's not part of this application, that they seek to connect to other transmission lines that are on the site. So that response was provided to EnergyCo, and EnergyCo confirmed that it does support the project, given that it has been successful in being granted access.

MR PEARSON: So EnergyCo supported it at the 1,300-megawatt capacity?

MS BREWER: They support the project overall, that's it.

MR PEARSON: OK. All right. Thank you.

MR MICHAEL WRIGHT: Hey, sorry, Nicole, I might just pull you up there as well. When I was looking through the EIS, I think the proponent was suggesting that this would power 830,000 homes or something like that. The figure we have here is 593,000. I was thinking, is that 593,000 based on, going back to Richard's point, the access to that new transmission line? So it doesn't account for the excess capacity. I'm just curious to know why there's that 300,000-odd difference in the number of homes that are being powered.

MS BREWER: Thank you. Look, I'll need to take that on notice and just confirm that. Sometimes the capacity factors used by the applicant and the Department in consultation with our energy colleagues within the Department are sometimes different. The 593,000 doesn't relate to what it has access capacity for, but it could be a factor of how the homes generated was calculated. So I'd say that it's just a difference in that calculator, and the calculator that we use is the one that's supported by DQ Energy.

MR PEARSON: Yeah, it's an interesting point, because I did notice in the local media on the weekend they were talking about 830,000 homes, and I think presumably they got that figure from the applicant. So it's something we might ask the applicant as well, Michael.

MR WRIGHT: Thanks, Richard.

MS BREWER: Thanks, Commissioner. Is there any other questions?

MR PEARSON: Sorry, back to you, Nicole. Not for now, I don't think. We'll keep going.

MS BREWER: Thanks. So let me just check. So I think in that strategic context around the energy transition, the Department considers the projects in the public's interest, and it would play an important role in increasing that renewable energy generation, and contributing to the transition to a cleaner energy system as those coal-fired generators retire.

Next slide, please. Now to biodiversity. So the applicant has focused on avoidance of impacts through that avoidance of the high-quality native vegetation and habitat through the design process. In particular, that's focused on avoiding and minimising impacts to areas of mapped important habitat for the Plains Wanderer, and areas of mapped threatened ecological communities. The areas of native vegetation in the development footprint comprise about 95% or 1,000 hectares of the wind farm development footprint. But most of this is that non-threatened shrubland or grassland.

About 2% of that is woodland that's in moderate or good condition, and about 3% or 35 hectares is derived native grassland. And then there's a further sort of around four hectares of non-threatened native vegetation that would be cleared near Broken Hill to facilitate those road upgrades. So there would be – the project has been designed to avoid those areas of impact, and there would be around 1,000 hectares of threatened ecological communities that are retained across that project site.

The project would impact about 12 hectares of threatened ecological communities listed under the BC Act and the Commonwealth EPBC Act. And that's around 0.3 hectares of the Myall Woodland, around one hectare of the Sandhill Pine Woodland and 0.02 hectares of that *Acacia melvillei* shrubland. Four threatened flora species were listed under the BC Act that were recorded on the wind farm site, and two threatened species were assumed to be present at the wind farm site and one at the Broken Hill site. Four of those are also listed under the Commonwealth Act.

Three threatened fauna species listed under the New South Wales Act were recorded, and one threatened species was assumed to be present on the wind farm site. And then a further four threatened fauna species were assumed to be present at the Broken Hill site.

The species credits are required for 14 species listed under the New South Wales Act, and eight of which are also listed under the Commonwealth Act. And that would be from – about half of those species would have direct impacts resulting from construction, and the remaining seven have an assumed presence. So

potential impacts on these species would be offset via credit offsets.

Next slide, please. Thanks. One bird species was listed as a candidate for serious and irreversible impacts; the endangered Plains Wanderer, which was recorded on site. So approximately two hectares of mapped important habitat for this species, and 10 hectares of the foraging habitat would be impacted as a result of the project.

MR PEARSON: Can I just ask a question there? Sorry, Nicole. Is that Plains Wanderer habitat, the 13 hectares, all in one location, or is it sort of spread out at different locations across the site, do you know?

MS BREWER: It is spread over the site.

MR PEARSON: OK. So it's not just one kind of whole 13 hectares, there's bits here, there and everywhere?

MS BREWER: Correct.

MR PEARSON: OK, thanks.

MR WRIGHT: Sorry, Richard. And that additional 13 hectares, Nicole, is that habitat that they're proposing to establish which doesn't currently exist?

MS BREWER: So perhaps I'll – there is about three hectares of that mapped important habitat that's going to be impacted and about 10 hectares of the foraging habitat that would be impacted. Because the serious and irreversible impacts for these species are linked to that important mapped habitat, the Department considers that it would be very difficult to conclude that an impact in that range is likely to contribute significantly to the extinction of that species, the Plains Wanderer.

So the applicant did review that proposed layout and it did identify further opportunities and, in fact, it reduced both of those areas of impact. So for the mapped important habitat, it went down from around five hectares to two hectares, and the habitat, the areas of suitable habitat, went down from 33 hectares to 10 hectares.

So the Department acknowledged that a precautionary approach might be appropriate, and it has been advising applicants to seek nature-positive outcomes. So the applicants offered to securely conserve an area of 13 hectares of the Plains Wanderer habitat, including no less than three hectares of that mapped important habitat, to achieve a nature-positive offsetting result.

MR WRIGHT: And that's off the project site, yeah? Was it within the project site?

MS BREWER: I think what they're proposing is that could potentially be within

the site, but our conditions allow them to be that it could be elsewhere.

MR WRIGHT: Either/or, OK, yep. Thanks, Nicole.

MS BREWER: So at this stage, they're proposing to achieve that by securing a non-credit generating area under a land-based offset, and that would establish as an agreement over a site for that rehabilitation, enhancement and protection in perpetuity, and that's what the Department concluded.

MR WRIGHT: Yes, so there's no regulatory requirement for them to do that, so they're doing that sort of voluntarily, effectively, yeah?

MS BREWER: Correct. So the requirements for offsetting relate only to that two hectares of mapped important habitat, and so that separately will be offset. This additional 13 hectares is – you're correct, we don't consider that it is required under the considerations for serious and irreversible impacts, so we don't consider that that's likely to contribute significantly to the extinction, but this is an additional area that the applicant is proposing.

MR WRIGHT: OK, thank you.

MS BREWER: In regard to bird and bat strike, the applicant's risk assessment identified six turbines as having a very high risk rating, and 28 turbines as having a high risk rating. So the approach that the applicant adopted when assessing those bird and bat strikes – perhaps if I take a step back. The approach in the Department assessing all of the bird and bat strikes for wind farms in New South Wales is a combination of that risk assessment and followed by post-determination adaptive management. So that adaptive management approach involves stringent requirements for baseline monitoring, and ongoing monitoring of any strike during operation, and triggers for adaptive management measures to avoid and minimise impacts. And that risk assessment that the applicant has done is a risk assessment without any mitigation measures in place.

That risk assessment also incorporated a number of very conservative assumptions in calculating that risk for blade strike and the barrier effects, and it was actually based on a draft policy from 2023 that has not been finalised. So the Department considers that the proposed mitigation measures through that adaptive management plan and the recommended conditions would effectively reduce and manage these prescribed impacts.

The applicant has also proposed a smart curtailment strategy which would involve restricting the spinning of the turbines below the cut-in speed, and that's the speed where it's spinning before it generates energy, and also based on some other monitoring. So the recommended conditions require the applicant to carry out that detailed monitoring, and carry out adaptive management if the impacts are higher than predicted.

Next slide, please. The impacts to native vegetation and species would generate

approximately 23,000 ecosystem credits, and about 31,000 species credits. So the Department's recommended conditions requiring the applicant to retire the required offsets prior to carrying out any development that would be impacted that would require offset. The Department's also recommended conditions allowing those offset liabilities to be reduced if the applicant can demonstrate further avoidance through micro-siting the infrastructure, or refining those ecological surveys for those species that were assumed to be present. So those specific conditions would also require the concurrence from the Minister for the Environment prior to determination.

Overall, the Department considers that the biodiversity impacts of the project are acceptable, and subject to the implementation of recommended conditions and offsetting the residual biodiversity impacts of the project.

Now on to transport. The project would generate up to 1,200 light vehicles and 750 heavy vehicles per day, with around a total of 3,500 size over mass, or OSOM vehicle movements over the whole construction period. But during operation, that traffic would be a lot lower. The applicant's proposing to use OSOM vehicles for transporting the wind turbine components from the Port of Adelaide to the site via Broken Hill, and then along the Cobb Highway via Wilcannia and Hay, which is shown on this figure.

Other large project equipment that doesn't require OSOM vehicles would be transported in heavy vehicles travelling north along the Cobb Highway via the Deniliquin, and travelling east from the Kidman Way followed by Four Corners Road. All vehicles would access the site via one of four site entrances. There's one off West Burrabogie Road, Jerilderie Road, Wargam Road, East-West Road, and there is an emergency site access off West Burrabogie Road. These site accesses would all require roadworks to allow for the safe traffic movements associated with the project.

So the applicant's also proposing to undertake road upgrades along that OSOM route, and that would include the construction of a new bypass and new track at Broken Hill. That's shown in the inset of the figure. There would also be pullover bays and rest stops that would be needed that would be detailed in a transport strategy, and upgrades to a roundabout in Hay along the Cobb Highway, and then upgrades to the intersection of the Cobb Highway with local roads closer into site to allow the vehicles to travel safely to their site access points. So no additional road upgrades will be required for the non-OSOM route from the other directions.

MR PEARSON: A quick question, Nicole. Anything in Ivanhoe or Wilcannia that's relevant to the assessment of this project, or do they go around those towns? What happens there?

MS BREWER: Let me just check. I'd need to check whether – I don't think that the route goes through those locations. I'm not sure if anyone in the team can shed any light. I don't think there are any upgrades that are proposed in either of those locations.

MR PEARSON: Yeah, do you think would they go through town though, or would they go bypass? I've never been to Ivanhoe, so I can't comment. But I think it would be worth knowing. I just want to make sure there's suddenly not some unintended consequence of the route that hasn't been thought about. I'm sure it would have been, but it would be good to know Wilcannia and Ivanhoe specifically.

MS BREWER: OK, we can get back to you on that. New South Wales – sorry, Transport for New South Wales has reviewed all of the information, and they've provided comment on where they think there might be a difference of opinion. So that's been the outcome of quite detailed assessment. But I can get back to you specifically on Ivanhoe and Wilcannia. But I guess I don't think any upgrades are proposed. The team's just confirmed with me that there aren't any upgrades that are proposed from Ivanhoe and Wilcannia.

MR PEARSON: Do they fall within the – what local government area is Ivanhoe in? I might be asking questions that you don't know the answer to here. It wouldn't be – would it be in Hay? Probably not. And Broken Hill is probably Wilcannia.

MR WRIGHT: I think Wilcannia is Broken Hill.

MS SARAH DINNING: Yes. And the Highway goes right through town.

MR PEARSON: Anyway, look, it's probably not a huge issue, just to – it occurred to me when I was looking at the map that what happens when you get to Wilcannia and Ivanhoe? But let's just get some further follow-up on that. That would be appreciated, thank you.

MS BREWER: OK, thanks Chair.

MR WRIGHT: I don't know if you're going to deal with it in a little while, Nicole, but OSOM movements from – it seems as though the proponent is suggesting that they might use the Port Newcastle route for – do you know, is that just a fallback, or what are they proposing to do there?

MS BREWER: So, none of those – that route, I think it was mentioned in one of the documents, but they haven't provided any assessment of that route. So it hasn't been allowed for through our – through the routes that are identified in our consent.

MR WRIGHT: OK. It's just that I think I saw it in their response to submissions report. So, sorry, Nicole, they're not proposing to pursue that as part of this DA?

MS BREWER: Look, we don't – the information that they've provided, other than that kind of indirect reference to it in the response to submissions, we don't have any of the other assessment information, so we haven't allowed for it. Are

there any other further questions? There's a little bit more that I just wanted to cover on traffic and transport. No.

So the applicant will need to consult with the Roads Authority in South Australia around any potential upgrades in South Australia. The transport strategy does require the applicant to demonstrate that any OSOM vehicles associated with the development can be accommodated on the road network, and the applicant will need to identify the relevant approvals pathways and the timing of those approvals and upgrades are in place.

So, following consultation with Transport for New South Wales, the Department recommended conditions requiring the applicant to undertake all of the necessary road upgrades to the satisfaction of the Roads Authority, to undertake dilapidation surveys, and repair any damage resulting from the construction traffic. They're also required to prepare that transport strategy and a traffic management plan for the development.

So the Department's satisfied that with the implementation of that strategy and the proposed transport routes, that the transport impacts could appropriately be managed.

MR WRIGHT: And just to be clear on that, Nicole, if there was damage to a road, a local Council road, during construction, the repair would be undertaken during construction, yeah?

MS BREWER: It depends on the nature of the impact. So there is a requirement in the conditions that if there are emergency repairs that are required, but kind of the wear and tear through construction, it would depend on the nature of that impact. So there is a dilapidation survey that's done to baseline prior to the construction period starting, and then a dilapidation survey at the end. But if emergency repairs are required, that's covered in the conditions.

MR PEARSON: Nicole, can I just ask one final question on traffic, which is, I think it's paragraph 170 of your report, says the New South Wales government may coordinate an approach for high-risk OSOM for the South West REZ as a whole. What's that about?

MS BREWER: Look, there are, because the Renewable Energy Zone has been declared and there are a number of applicants in this area, the New South Wales government is looking at a potential coordinated approach, but that's being discussed in the early stages at the moment. So we've progressed this assessment without that being in place, but it may be that something coordinated with the other applicants, particularly those who have received access to the South West REZ, there may be something that's coordinated between all of those applicants.

MR PEARSON: OK, and is that as part of a broader cumulative impact piece of work, like the Central West Orana REZ, or is it specific to traffic?

MS BREWER: There's some specific work that's being undertaken around OSOM to the REZes, and some discussions that are happening with those applicants around that coordinated approach. There are cumulative – I guess that baselining work is being done for this REZ around workforce accommodation and population, so that information, that baseline information is being prepared by the Department, and other areas of the Department are preparing that baseline information for water and waste.

And so that work has only just started, and similarly to the other baselining work that's going on for Central West, that will be prepared in consultation with the Councils, and will be presented to the whole of government steering committee, and then relevant departments within government will consider the response. But the road upgrade, the OSOM is a separate package of work that's being done to look at that kind of coordinated OSOM approach with all of the different applicants in the Southwest REZ.

MR PEARSON: Thank you.

MR WRIGHT: And Richard, I think I read somewhere that the proponent was looking for opportunities to share the cost of some of those OSOM upgrades with other RE proponents in the locality, I presume the adjacent wind farms and solar farms, etc. Is that –?

MS BREWER: Look, I mean, that's part, I guess, of what the state government is doing in looking at playing a role potentially in coordinating that, but that may be something that the applicant is also looking into.

MR WRIGHT: Yeah, and so just one more question for me for transport. There's a requirement to prepare a transport management plan and a transport strategy. I think I know the difference between the two, but could you maybe explain it in some more detail, Nicole?

MS BREWER: Thanks. So the transport strategy relates to specific areas where the applicant, I guess, has confirmed an envelope of impact and some potential locations for pullover bays, and for use of rest stops for that OSOM route. And so the transport strategy is quite specific to those elements of transporting the OSOM components, and confirming that their assumptions have been correct.

The traffic management plan is a standard traffic management plan that is required in all of our projects, and that's prepared in consultation with the relevant authorities and councils. And that provides how they're going to manage the whole of the project's traffic. So the transport strategy is kind of a preceding study, or to confirm some of the assumptions, particularly around OSOM movements.

MR WRIGHT: Thank you.

MS DINNING: Sorry, Chair, do you mind? Just one more question on transport,

Nicole, if I may. It's to the, when you're talking about dilapidation report before and after. So I'm assuming some of the roads are actually managed by Transport for New South Wales, but some will be local government. So that delineation is clear when those discussions are going to be held. Is that right?

MS BREWER: Yes. So the dilapidation surveys are done for – so they're done for the Council, the local roads, and state roads that are already B-double routes and that sort of thing are covered by the state process of maintaining those roads. But it's the local roads that will be subject to those dilapidation surveys.

MS DINNING: Dilapidation report, OK, great. Thank you.

MS BREWER: Thank you. On now to visual. So the Department assessed the project against the 2016 Wind Energy Guideline, and that included the visual assessment Bulletin, which forms part of that guideline. Although the new Energy Policy Framework was finalised in November, it doesn't apply to the assessment of this project, because these were issued prior to its finalisation and the EIS was lodged prior to its finalisation.

So the Department assessed the project against the performance objectives, which are contained in the 2016 Bulletin. And that covers visual magnitude, multiple wind turbine effects, landscape scenic integrity, key feature disruption, shadow flicker, blade glint and the aviation hazard lighting. So that 2016 Bulletin gives guidance on the performance objectives within certain distances. And they're known as the black and the blue line within the Bulletin, and that they are heights that are relevant to a proposed height of a turbine.

The Department notes that the potential visual impacts overall for this project are less likely to be significant, noting that there are only two non-associated residences within 5.5 kilometres, which is the blue line.

So starting with an assessment for public viewpoints, there were 20 public viewpoints that were assessed by the visual consultant, and they included picnic areas, and a rest area and some locations adjacent to the nature reserve. There were three viewpoints that were within the black line and another four between the black and the blue line. The LVIA or the landscape visual impact assessment identified that there would be limited traffic at those locations, and views would be of a short duration, and would not have a significant impact.

And similarly, there were some viewpoints along the Cobb Highway, and that's the road that provides the connection between Balranald, Hay, Wagga and Deniliquin, and views from the Cobb Highway have the benefit of the distance, with the closest turbine being approximately 10 kilometres. So the Department considered that the visual performance objectives would be achieved at all of those public viewpoint locations.

The assessment from private receivers, so there are very few non-associated receivers surrounding the project, which is quite different. And I guess is more of

a characteristic of projects located in this region than we have in our other areas of the state. So we have one non-associated residence within 3.75 kilometres of turbines, and that's the black line under the 2016 Bulletin. So that dwelling is actually unoccupied, and it's shown in that figure. But there are three turbines located within the black line, and the closest is approximately three kilometres. And then an initial five turbines between the black and the blue line.

The Department's assessment considered that the visual impacts to this residence would be acceptable, with the provision of some supplementary screening at the request of the owner, should it be requested. And the Department's recommended conditions to this effect.

MR WRIGHT: Hey, Nicole, when you say turbines between the black and the blue line, I'm looking at this map here, do you actually mean the black and blue line in this map?

MS BREWER: Yes, correct.

MR WRIGHT: There are turbines in that curtilage there?

MS BREWER: So there are turbines that are – so the black line shows 3.7 kilometres from all of the turbines, and the blue line shows the 5.5 kilometres.

MR WRIGHT: Yeah, but there are no turbines between the black and the blue lines though?

MS BREWER: It's that there are no receivers between the black and the blue lines.

MR WRIGHT: OK, correct.

MS BREWER: Yes. Sorry, that there are – sorry, that there are very few receivers between the black and the blue lines. So one is –

MR WRIGHT: Yes, there's certainly no turbines between the black and the blue lines.

MS BREWER: No, correct, because the black and the blue line is the distance from the turbines. So there's one non-associated residence that's between that black and the blue line, and that residence would benefit from existing vegetation that is already at that site. And the Department considers that the visual impacts at this residence would be minimal.

So the Department's assessment concluded that it was satisfied that the layout aligns with the Bulletin, but has recommended conditions requiring the applicant to provide screening for receivers within 5.5 kilometres, or the blue line, if it's requested by the landowner.

MR WRIGHT: Sorry, Richard, I'm going to ask another question about that particular proposed condition. Because having dealt with another wind farm at Spicers Creek, where the panel was suggesting to the Department and the proponent that a similar condition might be applied, where non-associated receivers were, I think, getting either a low or moderate visual impact. That wasn't agreed to. This appears to – noting that there's almost no receivers in the area, this appears to set a potentially different precedent, or am I misreading that?

MS BREWER: Our approach has been consistent over the wind farm assessments for any non-associated receivers within the blue line being able to request landscape screening.

MR WRIGHT: Even with a low visual impact.

MS BREWER: But it's commensurate. So the wording of the condition is that it's commensurate with the impact of the – at that location.

MR WRIGHT: OK, this says – but the intention here would be for any non-associated receiver to be able to request landscape treatment, correct?

MS BREWER: But the landscape treatment needs to have regard to that and be commensurate with the impact.

MR WRIGHT: So if it's a low impact, then it's unlikely there's going to be any landscape treatment. Is that the intention?

MS BREWER: Correct.

MR WRIGHT: OK.

MS BREWER: In regard to aviation hazard lighting, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, which is known as CASA, advise that the project is considered a hazard to aviation safety. And so it recommended that the wind farm be lit, and that medium to low intensity red obstacle lighting that is a minimum of 200 candelas would be appropriate considering the location of the project. And the applicant prepared an aviation lighting plan, which proposes the installation of night lighting on 95 turbines. CASA reviewed that plan and supported its recommendation.

So the Department's recommended conditions requiring the applicant to install that aviation hazard lighting in accordance with any CASA recommendations, and in a manner that minimises any adverse impacts.

In regard to shadow flicker –

MR PEARSON: Sorry, Nicole, just on aviation, because I don't know if we're going to come back to it on another slide, but they have to also seek approval to get variation to a couple of flight paths, is my recollection, from Airservices Australia. I know it's a different issue to lighting. Would that, if they don't get that

approval, would that lead to them having to reduce turbines? Will it potentially impact on some of these other projects that are in the pipeline? I don't know if these are, I presume these are commercial flights that need to be rerouted to avoid some of the turbines.

MS BREWER: I do cover that on a slide later.

MR PEARSON: Well, let's wait till we get there.

MS BREWER: OK, thank you. OK, so I guess in – sorry, shadow flicker. The applicant's assessment confirmed that there wouldn't be any exceedances, and the Department's made that recommendation in the conditions. And the Department also assessed the ancillary infrastructure and considered that that was also unlikely to have a significant visual impact.

So overall, and in conclusion, I guess the first part is that there are very few non-associated residences surrounding the project. The project does meet the visual performance objectives that are in the Bulletin, and that those recommended conditions require that the applicant needs to offer that screening, commensurate with the visual impact to reduce, to minimise the impacts of the visual appearance of the development.

So onto some of the other matters that the Department also considered in its assessment. If I can have the next slide, please. In regard to heritage, there were no non-Aboriginal heritage items listed on Commonwealth, national or state registers, but there was some items listed around the Broken Hill Road upgrades, and Council confirmed that the project wouldn't adversely impact these items.

In regard to Aboriginal heritage, there were a number of heritage items. That was 117 items identified within the development corridor, but there were no Aboriginal heritage items within the area for the Broken Hill Road upgrades footprint.

So at the request of the registered Aboriginal parties, the applicant did not undertake those tests or salvage excavations at this point in the assessment, and Heritage New South Wales accepted that approach, but they did request a draft test methodology to be developed in consultation with the RAPs. Which the applicant did prepare, and Heritage reviewed that methodology and confirmed that it addressed their concerns.

So during detailed design, the applicants committed to the mitigation of avoid, minimise and mitigate, and to complete those test excavations of the potential archaeological deposits prior to commencing any works. The Department's also recommended conditions requiring the applicant prepare an addendum heritage assessment report prior to commencing those works, and that would include a revised list of the items and any items that would be protected, salvaged or relocated, and that's included in the recommended conditions.

So those conditions require the applicant to protect the sites and the pads to avoid

and minimise the impacts of the sites and pads, and prepare a heritage management plan in consultation with the registered Aboriginal parties and Heritage New South Wales. And so the Department and Heritage New South Wales considered that subject to those conditions, the project would not significantly impact the Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the locality.

In regard to noise and vibration, the construction for the project would be limited to standard construction hours, with no work on Sundays or public holidays, except in certain circumstances. There are no non-associated receivers that would experience exceedances of the noise management level that's specified in the EPA's guidelines.

There might be some blasting that's required for bedrock for the foundations, but given that there's a large distance between any of that blasting activity and the nearest dwelling, the applicant would be able to comply with the relevant guidelines, and the Department's recommended conditions for controlling the blasting and strict criteria.

The construction traffic noise would comply with the relevant guidelines at all receivers, and the operational noise levels would also comply with the noise assessment Bulletin at all non-associated residences. The project would also have an environment protection licence issued by the EPA, which would also include those strict noise limits.

So those recommended conditions include restricting the construction hours, requiring the applicant to minimise noise and implementing mitigation measures per the relevant guidelines, and requiring the applicant to monitor and minimise construction vibration.

Next slide, please. In regard to soil and water, in regard to impact on waterfront land, there were some initial concerns from the water group, but the applicant is committed to micro-site the infrastructure where possible to avoid the impacts to waterfront land, and to ensure that all works on the waterfront land and within watercourses comply with those relevant policies and guidelines. And therefore the Department considers that subject to those conditions, the potential impacts on watercourses would be appropriately managed.

In regard to flooding, the site is subject to flooding, and that flood modelling that was done by the applicant was based on the 5% and the 1% annual exceedance probability, and the extreme or probable maximum flood events.

So the average flood depths across the site are up to 0.3 metres during a 1% AEP event, with a peak flood depth of around four metres within the kind of ponded areas for a 1% AEP event. The location of the temporary workforce accommodation is subject to flooding, but the peak flood depth is around two centimetres, and the 1% AEP in a probable maximum flood is about four centimetres.

So the Department recommended conditions requiring the preparation and implementation of an evacuation plan for the accommodation camp, and that would be in consultation with RFS and the New South Wales SES.

The applicant committed also to a range of measures being incorporated in the detailed design to minimise the extent of the project infrastructure within those flood levels. And that emergency plan that the Department has recommended conditions includes a flood emergency response plan, and that would be in consultation with RFS and SES. And so with the Department and Councils and CPHR, who's responsible also for flooding assessment, are satisfied that with the implementation of those management measures, flooding impacts could be appropriately managed.

The amount of water required for the project is around 600 megalitres for construction and that's water for dust suppression, concrete production, vehicle equipment and wash down and amenities. And then about an additional 24 megalitres of potable water per year would be required over the construction period.

So the applicants proposed to attain the water from multiple sources, either existing irrigation and groundwater from licensed bores under an agreement with the host land owner, extraction from the Coleambally irrigation scheme, harvested runoff from farm dams, and reuse of treated water from the temporary accommodation facilities for non-potable uses. And potable water would be carted from town supply.

The applicants also proposed an onsite water treatment system to collect and treat that waste water from the site offices and the accommodation, and that would be reused where possible for the non-potable water requirements for construction and operation. The EPA didn't raise any concerns, and the impact around groundwater, the groundwater at this location is expected to be quite deep at sort of 18 to 25 metres below ground level. So impact on groundwater, either quantity or quality, is considered unlikely, and because the project infrastructure is relatively shallow by comparison at around five metres.

In regard to erosion and sedimentation, the site's fairly flat and the risk from high velocity surface water flows is considered low. The applicants committed to an erosion and sediment plan, and the Department has considered that the erosion and sediment risks can be effectively managed by complying with the relevant requirements in the blue book.

In regard to hazards and risk, the site is mapped, is located in a mapped bushfire prone land by the RFS. So the applicants committed to establishing the Asset Protection Zones around each wind turbine, and the monitoring masts for the compound, that is for the operation and maintenance facilities and the substations, in accordance with the relevant guidelines.

The applicants also committed to the design complying with the relevant

guidelines and providing the required water supply for firefighting purposes and any relevant emergency and evacuation plans. And that is included in a recommended condition by the Department for that emergency plan, and also a fire safety study. So the Department considers that those bushfire risks could be suitably controlled through the standard fire management plans and procedures.

In terms of hazard and risks in regard to aviation safety, and this goes to your question earlier, Chair. So the site is located 56 kilometres south of the Hay Aerodrome. The assessment of aviation impacts concluded that there wouldn't be any adverse impacts, subject to the implementation of those mitigation measures.

So it was Airservices who have advised the maximum turbine would affect the lowest safe altitude for two air routes, that's H247 and W762, and impact the minimum sector altitude instrument procedure at the Hay Aerodrome. So the Department has recommended a condition requiring the applicant to consult with Airservices and this was the request of Airservices, and Airservices suggested that that could be achieved by an amendment to the air routes as long as that was with sufficient time prior to the commencement of construction. And Airservices reviewed those conditions and confirmed that those conditions were sufficient.

MR PEARSON: Yeah, I guess my question there Nicole is whether – we saw that map you put up right at the start where there's, if you like, a kind of a wall of renewable energy projects coming, are they going to look at rerouting those flights right around those future wind farms, or will they be just looking at avoidance of the turbines from this wind farm, and maybe they'll have to subsequently move the flights further down the track when other wind farms are approved?

MS BREWER: Potentially, I think that's a consideration obviously for Airservices and when we're into the assessment of those projects. So at this point, they've indicated that those air routes would be and could be amended to allow for this project. What more broadly happens for the other projects I guess would come as part of those later assessments of those projects.

MR PEARSON: OK, thank you.

MS BREWER: So the applicant also developed the lighting plan that we mentioned earlier, and that CASA reviewed that plan and agreed with those recommendations, and that there are recommended conditions for aviation hazard lighting in accordance with CASA's recommendations. RFS didn't raise any concerns about the projects, and as a result, there isn't anticipated to be any issues with aerial firefighting.

In regard to social and economic impacts, the project would provide benefits to the community through the 900 construction jobs in particular, and an injection of that $2.2 billion capital investment into the economy. The applicant has committed to community benefit sharing via community benefits for $893 per megawatt generation capacity installed, and that will be a 50% split between each Council, and that's per year for the duration of the project. And then an additional $158 per

megawatt has been agreed to be allocated to a dedicated First Nations fund.

So that those terms of the VPA have been agreed with Hay Shire and Edward River Council, and they would be paid into separate community enhancement funds for each Council that would be administered by the applicant in partnership with the relevant Council. So that equates to – sorry, Chair?

MR PEARSON: Sorry, yeah, Nicole, just the First Nations, that's a per annum thing as well?

MS BREWER: The same. So the overall proposed contribution is in line actually with the current guidelines, which is the $1,050 per megawatt over the life of the project, and that's split between some going to Council and some going to First Nations.

MR PEARSON: OK, thank you.

MS DINNING: Commissioner, could I just clarify there if I may?

MR PEARSON:

MS DINNING: So that 535 is based on the number of turbines that are being sought here, or the number that have access to the –?

MS BREWER: No, the number that have been sought access. So it's up to that total amount to each Council per annum over the life of the development.

MS DINNING: So whether they end up doing that many turbines at this point in time doesn't matter, the Council will still receive those monies?

MS BREWER: No, it does depend on the – it's the opposite. It does depend on the amount of megawatts installed.

MS DINNING: OK, so the agreement that they might receive 535, 500 per annum may not eventuate at this point?

MS BREWER: It's up to that amount. And so it depends on the final size of the project.

MS DINNING: Yes, no apologies, Nicole. You've said it and I'm just processing it, OK, yep, good. Sorry, everyone. Thank you.

MR WRIGHT: That's a really good question, Sarah. And Nicole, just to drill down that a little further. So 535, 500 per Council, is that based on the amount of capacity that EnergyCo is granting to the proponent?

MS BREWER: No, all of these numbers are the up-to amount. So it could be up to that for the proposed 1,300 megawatts that is proposed for the project, not what

they have currently received access for.

MR WRIGHT: Do we have a figure for what they've currently got access to? Because that would be useful to know. Because that would revise down the figure for –

MS BREWER: Sure, I mean, it's about, maybe it's a little bit over half, but we can provide those numbers to you.

MR PEARSON: It's possible, Nicole, they could install the full 246, if that's the number of turbines, but only use like maybe 180 or something of those at any one time. And that would then flow on to the payment to Councils and First Nations fund.

MS BREWER: Look, Chair, that's perhaps a question for the applicant. I'm not sure that they would construct the whole wind farm and not operate them. I suspect that they, and the information that they've given to us, is that they may look to stage it. I guess what they've said in that advice that they provided back to us is that it might not be that they exactly construct the 830 megawatts, but I would imagine they wouldn't be constructing all 1,300 megawatts if they weren't able to generate that.

I think what they were advising us was they might construct more than the 800, because there are some system losses. And so what they can export to the grid at different times, would obviously be limited by what they have access to, but they might construct a bit more, but I don't think it would be the full 1,300 megawatts.

MR PEARSON: OK. Something we can talk to the applicant about, yeah.

MS BREWER: Correct. But it could be that there might be – I guess what they've said is that if some of the other applicants that have been granted access potentially fall over, or there could be other circumstances where they are able to construct more than that, or more capacity might be able to come online later in discussion with EnergyCo, or with a connection to another line.

MR PEARSON: OK. Thank you.

MS BREWER: So there is a proposal to construct the temporary workers accommodation facility within the site, and that would accommodate up to 430 workers, and that's to manage some of those potential housing and short term accommodation availability in the region, that would be designed and maintained in accordance with an accommodation camp management plan. And that would also include details on the provision of their health and medical services for those occupants of the accommodation camp. There would also be

MR PEARSON: Sorry, Nicole. Just so that's about half the workers that would be accommodated at the accommodation camp. What happens to the other half? Unless they're all sleeping in the same bed, which I don't think they are.

MS BREWER: So I think, so some of those would be located within the region.

MR PEARSON: As in Hay or Deniliquin, and then they'd have to bus them into the worksites by day?

MS BREWER: Potentially. It would depend on sort of where they're located. Yes.

MR PEARSON: Yeah. And I guess that's part of the housing and employment strategy that they have to prepare. Because, yeah, I'm just – they're reducing their impact on local accommodation by half, but they they're still going to have a quite significant need. Is there any reason why they didn't propose a bigger work workforce camp?

MS BREWER: Look, I think over the construction of a project, it really depends on how an applicant chooses to stage a project. And those numbers are the maximum peak. So they don't actually – the maximum is not for the whole length of the project. It's usually for a shorter period. And so I think that would have been a factor in the number of workers that they're choosing to accommodate onsite.

MR PEARSON: Sure. I mean, again, we can talk to them about that. I'm just mindful of the time, and I know all our questions are pushing the time out, but we probably are meant to have finished by now, aren't we Jane? And you're on mute. Yeah.

MS JANE ANDERSON: Yeah, we just need to wrap up, in the next five minutes or so.

MR PEARSON: Yeah, if we could. I imagine you're getting quite close to the end of your presentation, Nicole, and we've covered pretty much the entire agenda as we've gone, but yeah, we'll finish up by 10 past at the latest, yep.

MS BREWER: Look, I can move quite quickly through the next slides.

MR PEARSON: Thank you.

MS BREWER: Decommissioning and rehabilitation, it's the same approach as we have on the other projects, where we have the outcome-based conditions. In regard to cumulative impacts, I think we've talked a little bit around this. The EIS did identify the potential for some of the construction to coincide with other projects there at various stages within the planning system. That includes Bullawah, The Plains, and Dinawan. And so the applicant's committed to coordinating those construction activities with the other projects.

The transport assessment did include a cumulative impact. It did find that there was spare capacity on the Cobb Highway, and in fact, the other projects are also

proposing different access routes to the site, particularly for OSOM. I think because a number of projects have received access, it may be that the confluence of that community – sorry, cumulative impact may be a little bit more spread out to the ones that have access now, and potentially others at a different timeframe. So I guess a lower chance that all of them will be constructing all at once because of the differences in access to the network.

MR PEARSON: Sure.

MS BREWER: So there are, as I mentioned earlier, there are some of the baseline studies that are being done, and that will go to the whole of government SteerCo for its action and decisions on the next steps. The recommended conditions, the approach to conditions is to help achieve that certainty and consistency between projects, and essentially to offer that outcome focused approach. The Department's compliance branch conduct site inspections during construction, and there's a process of audits. And there's also the environment protection licence that's managed by the EPA.

I've spoken about many of the bespoke conditions, that we've proposed for the project, but we've also included micro-siting for turbines that can move no more than 300 metres from the coordinates. The revised location is to be 40 metres away from the Strahler stream watercourses, and the revised location needs to be a distance at least one times the tip height from the boundary of the easement for Project Energy Connect, and that was in consultation with TransGrid; and that the revised location of a wind turbine is at least 500 metres away from an active white belly sea eagle nest.

The other bespoke condition that we spoke about earlier was that transport strategy that would be prepared in consultation with Transport for New South Wales, Energy Corporation and the Councils, and other SSD renewable energy projects.

So in summary, the Department has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the merits. The site's in the South West REZ. It's an area that's strategically advantageous with a strong renewable resource potential. It does have proposed access to Energy Connect, and it has been granted access. The project's been designed to avoid those key constraints, the biodiversity and heritage constraints, and the residual impacts the Department considers would be minor, and could be managed through the recommended conditions of consent.

The project is going to assist in the transition of the electricity sector from coal and gas fired to low emissions sources, and it is consistent with New South Wales policy. And the battery allows the project to store energy for dispatch to the grid, when the wind isn't blowing and during those periods of peak demands.

So the Department considers that the project achieves an appropriate balance between maximising the efficiency of that wind resource and minimising the potential impacts. And on balance, the Department considers the project is in the public interest and is approvable, but subject to the recommended conditions of

consent.

MR PEARSON: Thank you, Nicole. Commissioners, any final questions for Nicole?

MR WRIGHT: No. No thanks.

MS DINNING: Yes, Chair, just one brief one. Look, I've just been looking at the concrete issue, and I think what they're proposing to do is mobile concrete plants. And I'm just wondering without – I know there's no detail there, but I imagine that will have an impact on roads as well. I don't know if that would be included in traffic management transport plans. It's a level of detail probably not appropriate at this point, but I'm just raising it now.

MS BREWER: OK, thanks Commissioner.

MS DINNING: It's something we'll follow up on at some point, yeah. Is that alright, Nicole, yep? It's a proper question, yep.

MS BREWER: That's fine.

MR PEARSON: Just a final one from me. The micro-siting is 300 metres on this project. I think other projects it's been 100 metres. Is there any reason for 300 metres?

MS BREWER: There is. This assessment, and it is possible under the guidelines, to request micro-siting as long as the assessment has been done within that corridor. And so for other projects, the assessment has only been done within a smaller corridor. In this instance, the assessment has been done within that larger corridor. So the Department considered that it was OK and appropriate to reflect that micro-siting.

MR PEARSON: Thank you. Jane or Geoff, anything from you guys?

MR GEOFF KWOK: Nothing from me, thanks, Richard.

MR PEARSON: All right, well, thank you so much, Nicole and team. There's a few questions on notice, which I think we'll just formalise that, just so that we're all on the same page on that, just through an exchange of emails, probably, Jane, I think is how we'll do that. Other than that, a big thanks for that presentation and for answering our questions. And we'll talk again regarding this project down the line. So thank you so much.

MS DINNING: Thank you.

MS BREWER: Thanks very much, Chair.

MR PEARSON: Have a good day.

MS BREWER: And thanks for the opportunity to present today.

MR PEARSON: No problem. See you all.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED