

Good Morning

I represent the Bundure District Landholder Group, which is a collective of near neighbours of the Spark Dinawan Battery and Solar Project.

May I start by expressing our disappointment and frustration that this hearing has not been held within a public forum.

From the very start of the Southwest Renewable Energy roll out, we have found the connection between proponent's and government agencies with the broader Riverina community totally unsatisfactory and unacceptable. It is very difficult to expect the wider community to understand the impacts the developments will have on their landscape and the covert costs to them associated with accommodating such large projects in our region. We have found that the process has lacked the necessary transparency and scrutiny that would normally be required of such projects of this scale. The poorly attended drop-in sessions as a form of community engagement provide testament to the inadequacy of community consultation and transparency in this space.

Our incorporated group of family farming businesses are to be the near neighbours of both the Yanco Delta Wind, the Spark Dinawan Wind and Solar Projects which combined account for 70 %of Renewable Energy infrastructure in the SWREZ . We are also to host several transmission lines on our properties to facilitate the transmission of Renewable Energy and are near neighbours to the Dinawan substation. We will soon be neighbouring the Spark, Origin and VNI West accommodation camps with a combined population of around 1800 people. Our current community population is approximately 40 people over a large area with the road and infrastructure to adequately match that population density and no more.

We took exception to the SPARK response to submissions (ref ES2) where they belittled the number of local submissions to their EIS. We may be small in number, but we feel we represent a larger community base who are either unaware or ill-informed of the pending developments. We stand firm that our concerns be acknowledged, considered and that we are always treated with respect, in particular reference to the negotiation of near neighbour agreements. Until recently there were several unrealistic demands and restrictions placed on those landholders looking to sign an agreement.

The mental and physical strain on these landholders during these agreement negotiations has been overwhelming.

As neighbours to, the Spark Solar development and other projects we are to face an enormous social and economic cost to our businesses and way of life of which we believe has been grossly underestimated by both developers and government agencies. The cumulative impacts of these developments in our local area compounds this disruption to our small community. We are continually challenged convincing Spark Renewables and others of these impending costs to our businesses.

The impacts I reference are

Telecommunications and connectivity have over the last 2 years been severely reduced during the construction of the Energy Connect Transmission Line in our area. The cumulative addition of Spark Renewables, Origin, VNI West and associated accommodation camps during construction, will further disrupt our connectivity and mobile access. We have raised this issue with Transgrid, Energy Co, Origin and Spark Renewables, Telstra and even the telecommunication ombudsman ON REPEATED occasions with NO proposed solution. The inability of key stakeholders such as the Dinawan Solar and Energy Co to coordinate a solution to this problem by upgrading the phone tower is disappointing. It is extremely frustrating and difficult to run our businesses with little or no connectivity and minimal phone coverage.

The disruption to our local ROAD network by Dinawan Solar will further add to their deteriorating condition of a road network that is barely acceptable prior to the commencement of further project construction. Despite assurances from proponents that they are to upgrade and maintain these roads, our experiences with the recent Energy Connect construction; it wasn't until after repeated local request that the Bundure Rd was adequately maintained. The initial problem was to ascertain who was actually responsible. More clarity around who is responsible is essential for not only Spark but all other projects using our roads. The cumulative impact of multi developments usage will complicate and amplify this problem without proper planning and coordination.

Security and safety of our local community is a huge issue for us with several criminal activities reported during Energy Connect construction.

We have requested Dinawan to do everything possible during construction to ensure our properties and personal safety are protected. The law enforcement agencies responsible for this area are remotely based leaving us extremely vulnerable.

The increased cost of INSURANCE premiums to our businesses without government intervention to limit liability to near neighbours to renewable energy infrastructure, needs urgent consideration. We would advocate Spark Solar and Battery development provide neighbouring properties within 10km a “Hold Harmless Agreement” thus limiting our liability. Why should near neighbours have the financial burden of increased insurance costs? It is not our choice to live next to multibillion dollar developments?

Other hidden costs to near neighbours of The Spark Solar project are the social and environmental / biodiversity disruption, the strain on our mental health the cumulative noise and visual impact the project will have to our way of life and on the potential devaluation of our landholdings. We note the impact of Dinawan Solar could have been significantly negated if the solar location was developed further into the property of the hosts expansive farm, not opposite the front gate of a neighbour.

The risk of fire sits very high on our list of concerns at a local level not only elevated fire risk of the Solar /Battery development but also the inability of access in the case of a fire within the project area. The potential limitation of the use of aerial firefighting in our area hosting 315 wind turbines is also of great concern.

We question the reference (page 58) defining the land occupied by the Dinawan Solar project as I quote “NOT important agricultural land “. This aside our group believe baseline testing of the site needs to be done independently (reference 5.3.7 page 63) with more detail to ensure that drainage off the site and ultimately into the Yanco Creek via the DC800 drain is devoid of any chemical residue. It is not clear to us who would be held responsible to any breach of the EPA act in relation to residue contamination directly from the Dinawan Solar Battery Project.

Over the last three years, our group have been proactive in communicating with Spark Renewables as both their Wind and Solar Projects have progressed. We have found it particularly challenging and time-consuming

outlining the impacts the project will have on neighbouring properties. We believe the NSW Planning guidelines don't go far enough in protecting and supporting near neighbours and are too one sided in the developers favour and at times been used by Spark to minimise their commitment to a negotiated agreement and or benefit sharing arrangement. We could be excused for believing there are two sets of regulatory requirements one for Renewable Energy developments and one for other similar large-scale developments.

The Bundure District Landholder Group are increasingly concerned with the total lack of planning and coordination of the developments. To be totally honest we believe the SOUTH West Renewable Zone is an absolute shamble. For example, we have one developer Spark Renewables commanding all the immediate land to the west of the Dinawan Substation with renewable energy infrastructure not allowing another Energy company transmission line access into the Substation. This is now resulting in the use of McLennan's Bore Rd, where a significant stand of Weeping Myall will be compromised. In this case poor planning equals a poor result for our environment. The protection of our native vegetation on our public roadsides provides us with a valued corridor of native vegetation and protected species none of which was included in the original EIS of developments.

The location of the Dinawan substation on the eastern extremity of the Southwest Renewable Energy Zone where it is landlocked by Spark renewables is a major oversight of NSW Planning, ultimately limiting future developments further west without actually having transmission line access into Dinawan Substation. Are our community and local environment to be expected to accommodate unnecessary additional transmission lines through our landscape? Surely a more central location of the substation in the South West RE Zone would ensure far greater development access and a reduced impact on our environment.

The premature granting of planning consent by NSW Planning to the YDWF in December 2023, which has resulted in significant modifications through the EPBC to their project, is further evidence of the reckless and rash decision-making processes applied to Renewable projects in our community giving us no confidence in the process going forward.

These are all examples of the lack of planning and coordination of the Southwest Renewable Energy Zone. We do not see Energy Co performing its core responsibilities as Renewable Energy infrastructure planner and coordinator beyond simply filling a nominal role. Currently we are witnessing “poor Planning, poor execution and poor management” Our community deserves a South West Renewable zone that is well planned and will minimize its environmental footprint.

The Dinawan Solar and Battery Project will without doubt have a lasting impact on the rich diverse nature of our native grassland. The CUMULATIVE impacts of the Dinawan Solar project have although been assessed under the Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines (ref 6.14 EIS) for state Significant Developments, are inadequate and don't sufficiently appreciate the sensitive and fragile nature of our environment. The release of the cumulative impact report to be compiled by Energy Co is long overdue for our environment, our community neighbour agreements and risk assessment. IT will be too late.

As a group of anxious neighbours, we need further assurances that the Dinawan Solar Development is made accountable during construction. We currently possess little confidence in the processes outlined. We question if enough recourses and authority have been allocated to Local Government as part of their scrutiny and potential compliance of their conditions of consent documented in the “Response to Submission Report”. We remain sceptical that Energy Co and / or NSW Planning have the necessary authority to ensure the Dinawan Solar project follows the details set out in the EIS and subsequent Submission Report.

The Bundure District Landholder Group remain committed to ensuring the impacts of the energy transition in our landscape can provide us with a positive legacy. At this point in time the Dinawan Solar Project is only providing us with increased costs to our businesses, disruption to our environment /Biodiversity, our unique landscape and our way of life.

None of us have chosen to live next to imposing renewable energy infrastructure or to have 80-meter-high towers and high voltage transmission lines running through our distinctive landscape and productive agricultural land. **END**

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