



TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: BULLAWAH WIND FARM (SSD-50505215)

DEPARTMENT MEETING

PANEL:	NEAL MENZIES (Chair) SUELLEN FITZGERALD MICHAEL WRIGHT
OFFICE OF THE IPC:	JANE ANDERSON GEOFF KWOK
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE:	NICOLE BREWER REBECCA SOMMER EMMA MITCHELL GABRIELLE ALLAN
LOCATION:	ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE
DATE & TIME:	2:00PM – 3:00PM WEDNESDAY, 12 th AUGUST 2026

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR NEAL MENZIES: Okay. Gabby, welcome.

5 **MS GABRIELLE ALLAN:** Thank you.

10 **MR MENZIES:** Let me find my statement and read it out and then we're in action. So, before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from the land of the Kombumerri people. I'm at the beautiful Gold Coast, I'm looking out here there's the beach immediately to my right, tempting me for when we finish this meeting. So, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands from which we're meeting virtually today and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

15 Welcome to the meeting to discuss the Bullawah Wind Farm state significant development application currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, BayWa r.e. Projects Australia Pty Ltd, proposes to develop a wind farm with an electricity generation capacity of up to 804 megawatts in the South West Renewable Energy Zone.

20 The project site is approximately 28 kilometres southwest of Hay and extends across three local government areas – Hay Shire, Edward River, and Murrumbidgee. The project involves construction of up to 141 turbines with a maximum tip height of 300 metres, a 359-megawatt/718-megawatt-hour battery energy storage system, transmission connection, and ancillary infrastructure.

25 My name is Neal Menzies. I'm the Chair of this Commission Panel and I'm joined by my fellow commissioners, Suellen Fitzgerald and Michael Wright. And we're also joined by Jane Anderson and Geoff Kwok from the office of the Independent Planning Commission.

30 In the interests of openness and transparency and to ensure the 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. This 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.

35 It's important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it's considered appropriate. If you're asked a question and are not in a position to answer, you may take the question on notice. Following the meeting, the Commission will advise you in writing of any questions taken on notice that the Panel considers require a formal response. Any subsequent response or information provided to the Commission will be then published on our website.

40 I request that all participants here today introduce themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure that they do not speak over the top of each other, to ensure accuracy of the transcript.

45 Okay. Now, we can begin.

MS NICOLE BREWER: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, my name's Nicole Brewer, I'm the Director for Energy Assessments at the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Sorry, I'll just ask the team to share the slides, please. Thank you. Next slide.

So, thank you very much for the opportunity to provide an overview of the Department's assessment of the Bullawah Wind Farm, focusing on the matters that were identified in the Commission's agenda that was provided. Today I'm going to cover the strategic context, community engagement, and focusing on the key issues and other matters, including the energy transition, traffic and transport, biodiversity and visual impacts, the Department's recommended conditions, and the Department's overall evaluation of the project.

Next slide, please. The proposed Bullawah Wind Farm is southeast of Hay, and as you mentioned, Neal, in the local government areas of Hay Shire, Murrumbidgee and Edward River. The project is seeking approval for up to 141 wind turbines and around 804 megawatts with a battery up to 359 megawatts. The turbines have a proposed maximum tip height of 300 metres, a hub height of 200 metres, and a maximum blade length of 100 metres.

The project is located within the declared South West Renewable Energy Zone and it is intending to connect to both the REZ transmission line, which is Project EnergyConnect, and the existing Transgrid 220-kilovolt transmission line. The EnergyConnect project has completed construction and it's currently in the commissioning and testing phase.

EnergyCo has granted the project access rights to connect to the REZ transmission line for around 260 megawatts to Project EnergyConnect. And the Applicant's indicated that the project might be staged to optimise generation and transmission and any future augmentation of the transmission network that might potentially provide for additional capacity to connect.

The project area's on predominantly grazing land that's sparsely populated, with few neighbouring residences on large rural landholdings. There are several other renewable energy projects, as you can see from the figure there, in the surrounding area, including Pottinger Wind Farm which is adjacent, but also the Plains Wind Farm, Dinawan Wind Farm, and Yanco Delta Wind Farm.

Next slide, please. I've included this slide just to give a little bit of additional context on the close proximity of some of the wind farms to one another, and for Bullawah particularly, the close proximity of the approved Pottinger Wind Farm.

Next slide, please. The Department exhibited the EIS and received 87 public submissions, comprising 68 objections, 17 submissions in support, and 2 in comment. Importantly, there were no objections received from people residing within 15 kilometres of the project area, and around 93% of the objections came from people living more than 50 kilometres away, and that includes around 20 interstate submissions.

The Department's also received advice from government agencies and submissions from the three host councils. Murrumbidgee Council supported the project, while Hay Shire and Edward River councils provided comments and recommendations.

5 The most common issues raised in objections related to decommissioning and waste, biodiversity, renewable projects generally, and the agricultural impacts. And the Department also visited the site in November 2024.

10 Next slide, please. So, I'll now focus on the four key assessment issues identified by the Department and in the Commission's agenda. And they are the energy transition, traffic and transport, biodiversity, and visual impacts.

15 Next slide, please. The Department considers the project is consistent with the relevant commonwealth and state policies which identify the need to diversify electricity generation sources while maintaining energy security and reliability. The project would generate up to 804 megawatts of renewable energy, which is enough to power 463,400 homes, and it would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 1.7 million tonnes annually.

20 The project would assist NSW in achieving its legislated net zero emissions targets and would contribute towards replacing generation capacity as the coal-fired power stations continue to retire. The inclusion of the 359-megawatt battery would improve reliability of supply by storing energy to provide electricity during periods of high demand or lower wind generation.

25 So, the Department considers the project would play an important role in increasing renewable energy generation capacity, whilst also supporting energy security and contributing to the transition to a cleaner electricity system.

30 Next slide, please. Now, to traffic and transport. So, traffic impacts during construction are from construction vehicles, materials deliveries at the workforce, as well as deliveries of the very large turbine components, and they're known as high-risk heavy vehicles requiring escort, and also known as over-sized/over-massed (or OSOM), sorry.

35 At peak construction, the project would generate up to 528 heavy vehicle trips and 530 light vehicle trips per day. There would be a maximum of seven OSOM deliveries during each working day. But during operation, the traffic would be minimal. OSOM vehicles would transport those wind components from either the Port of Newcastle one of three routes, depending on load dimensions, or Port Adelaide via Robinvale to Hay before using the local roads to access the project area.

40 So, the Applicant assessed the transport route from those two ports to Hay for a smaller maximum turbine size of 80 metres, and assessed the transport route from Hay to the project site for the maximum turbine dimensions being the 100-metre blade length. The recommended consent conditions specify the dimensions for all those routes, recognising that assessment approach and provides detail of those routes. The recommended consent also restricts that blade length to 80 metres unless the Applicant can demonstrate blades larger than that can be accommodated on the full approved

transport route. Any approvals that are needed within other states – South Australia or Victoria – for those routes to site would be sought separately as needed.

5 The Department also considered the potential number of large-scale deliveries to ports, noting that port capacity and scheduling are matters that involve coordination between several relevant authorities. And so, the Department's recommended a condition of consent requiring the Applicant to consult with the relevant port authority, Transport for NSW, and the NSW Office of the Cross-Border Commissioner for the ports in another state. And the purpose of that is just to provide the advance warning and verify
10 that those movements and deliveries can be accommodated.

Should the Commission determine to approve the project, the Department considers that the proposed consultation requirements provide that framework for those port authorities to receive that information for consideration.

15 Next slide, please. So, a little bit further on traffic and transport. The vehicles would be accessing the site via one of 13 access points. There is a 14th access point and that provides access to the accommodation camp, and that would be primarily for light vehicles travelling to and from the camp. The assessment did identify the need for state and local intersection and road upgrades, and these road upgrades would allow for
20 vehicles to safely travel to the site access points.

So, of particular note to draw your attention to is the intersection of the Cobb Highway and Jerilderie Road, which is also an access for Pottinger Wind Farm and is the
25 primary access for the Bullawah Project. Denoting the volumes of traffic, the cumulative impact between both of those projects as well as the OSOM movements for both of those projects, the Department recommended that this intersection be upgraded to a channelised left turn, and that aligns with the upgrade that is approved for the Pottinger Wind Farm. And additionally, the recommended condition requires that the
30 Applicant contribute the cost of constructing that intersection if Pottinger Wind Farm deliver that upgrade first.

The three councils commented on potential impacts of the project on road infrastructure and local traffic, and those traffic issues are central to the concerns of
35 councils generally in this region. So, Hay Shire Council raised concerns regarding the capacity of Jerilderie Road, and they highlighted a potential need for additional works along that road to accommodate the loads and the vehicles. So, we requested that the Applicant provide assurance, which they did provide, that those maintenance commitments would be sufficient to enable the project.

40 So, that review confirmed that those maintenance commitments were appropriate measures to address the concerns and provide a safe and functional road, and they committed to maintaining the existing condition of Jerilderie Road through assessing those road conditions weekly and rectifying defects that are identified in accordance
45 with the Austroads Guidelines. So, the Department considers that that maintenance regime is sufficient to support the functionality of Jerilderie Road and ensure that that's maintained throughout construction.

Following consultation with Transport for NSW and the relevant councils, the Department recommended conditions requiring the Applicant undertake all the necessary road upgrades to the satisfaction of the roads authority, undertake dilapidation surveys of the relevant local roads, repair any damage resulting from construction traffic, and to prepare a Traffic Management Plan for the development.

So, the Department is satisfied that the transport routes are feasible, and that the road network impacts can be appropriately managed through upgrades, maintenance requirements, and those traffic management measures.

Next slide, please.

MR MENZIES: Yes, we've got a question from Suellen, so we'll just jump in with that.

MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD: Yes, thank you, if that's okay.

MS BREWER: Of course.

MS FITZGERALD: Nicole, given the number of other projects in the vicinity, is there going to be that classic problem of deciding who has impacted local roads in terms of construction impacts? Are they – I suppose my question is: at the fine detail level, is there an overlap of the projects, or is it just these major intersections where they're going to overlap?

MS BREWER: Thanks for the question, Suellen. So, the overlap to a certain extent is for those OSOM routes. There are a number – so, not all projects are proposing the same OSOM routes into this region. There are other projects that are proposing to go through the Balranald location, and then more immediately close into site it's really the interaction with the Pottinger Wind Farm.

Our dilapidation conditions relate to the requirement for an applicant to make good any development-related impact. So, yes, there will be a number of projects using some of the roads and so conceptually that then needs to be attributed to the development-related damage and may be apportioned if there are multiple projects using the road at the same time, maybe apportioned based on their – the portion of traffic travelling down that road.

MS FITZGERALD: Okay. Thanks, Nicole. So, there's processes that can be adopted to help with that apportioning of damage between all the different projects. Great. Thank you for that.

MS BREWER: Thanks, Suellen.

MR MENZIES: And Michael?

MR MICHAEL WRIGHT: Thanks, Neal. Thanks, Nicole. Just a question, in terms of Jerilderie Road, when I was looking at the original Hay Council submission, it seemed to suggest that in its view there was a requirement for that road to be upgraded

rather than just maintained. Based on what you're telling us, it would appear as though the Department is of the view that maintenance is sufficient for – and there's no requirement to actually either widen or strengthen the road. Is that correct?

5 **MS BREWER:** That is correct. So, this was – and to give a little bit of the background and an overview of where we landed and how we got there. There is early consultation with the council that a very high level mentioned that and requested road upgrades. There was a response to that through the Submissions Report and that was accepted by council.

10 There were further discussions later in the assessment process around council's views on Jerilderie Road, and most recently they provided some additional documentation that provided some information about the nature of that road and how it was constructed and what its expectations were for maintenance along that road. And so, 15 that was the key piece of information, I guess, for us, that supported council's request to look at Jerilderie Road with that supporting information.

MR WRIGHT: So, effectively Hay Shire Council is satisfied with that proposed maintenance regime.

20 **MS BREWER:** So, we received that information from Hay Shire Council and that information was provided to the Applicant. And we requested that the Applicant provide a review of that information and the commitments that it could achieve what was being set out in those Hay Shire Council documents. And we've, the Department 25 considers that that maintenance regime is sufficient to support that functionality of Jerilderie Road.

MR WRIGHT: Okay, okay. Sorry, Neal, can I just – while we're dealing with transport, just one other question. In terms of the matters that TfNSW initially raised, 30 they appear to have been dealt with. Is there any other, from a TfNSW perspective, I know they wanted detailed design plans amongst other things for upgrades, so are TfNSW's issues all now put to bed effectively?

35 **MS BREWER:** So, that was an iterative process through the provision of additional information to get to the strategic designs in a way that Transport for NSW were comfortable with, and they're comfortable with the proposed conditions as well.

MR WRIGHT: Okay. Thank you.

40 **MR MENZIES:** Thanks, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Thank you. If you're okay, I'll move onto biodiversity.

MR MENZIES: Yes, we're set to go forward.

45 **MS BREWER:** Thank you. So, biodiversity was one of the most commonly raised issues by both the community and government agencies. The Applicant did focus on avoidance of the impact through avoidance of higher quality native vegetation and the habitat through the design process. And in particular, this work focused on avoiding

and minimising impacts to areas of the mapped important habitat for the Plains-wanderer and also minimising impacts to the areas of mapped threatened ecological communities (or TECs).

- 5 The Department considers that the Applicant has demonstrated substantial avoidance and minimisation of biodiversity impacts through the project design process. The disturbance footprint within the project area is approximately 637 hectares, and then there are further 19 hectares that are associated with the road upgrades.
- 10 Although most of that vegetation proposed to be cleared, around 95%, is native vegetation, there is the large proportion of that (87%) is non-threatened vegetation, and that's primarily native grassland and shrubland that's been subject to long-term grazing activities.
- 15 The project would impact around 80 hectares of threatened ecological communities, including two communities listed under the NSW Act and a subset of one of those communities that's also listed under the Commonwealth Act.
- 20 There are five threatened flora species that would be impacted by the project, and four threatened fauna species, and those were the Plains-wanderer, the Little Eagle, the Barking Owl, and the Southern Bell Frog. Species credits are required for eight of those nine species impacted, and the potential impacts on those species would be offset via the offset credits.
- 25 The project would impact on potential habitat for the Plains-wanderer but no mapped important habitat for this species and that mapped habitat is an area identified as being prioritised for conservation and offset, so none of that habitat would be impacted, and so there are no known species credits that are generated for that species.
- 30 Next slide, please. I'll now go into a little bit more detail about the Plains-wanderer, as there were some specific considerations for this species. So, the Plains-wanderer is a small, ground-dwelling bird that its habitat is open sort of grasslands. It's listed as endangered under the NSW Act and critically endangered under the Commonwealth Act. And there are specific requirements under the Biodiversity Conservation
- 35 Regulation where an impact is to be regarded as serious and irreversible if it is likely to contribute significantly to the risk of extinction of a threatened species or ecological community.
- 40 So, the assessment of the Plains-wanderer impacts is dealt with in a different way to most other species. The species does have those areas that have been mapped by government agencies as containing that critical habitat for species survival, movement, breeding or recovery, and that's in what I mentioned earlier was called the mapped important habitat. But only there are those impacts in the mapped important habitat generate credits under the BAM. So, there's approximately 1,400 hectares of that
- 45 mapped important habitat within the project area, but the Applicant focused their design and layout so that there would be no mapped important habitat that would be impacted by the project. So, therefore there are no species credits required to be offset.

But the assessment of serious and irreversible impacts (or SAI) also considered that the species was recorded on site and that there was an area of around 170 hectares of supplementary suitable habitat. So, habitat that was not as part, not part of the government agency mapped important habitat mapping, but it was habitat based on the vegetation type that might be impacted by the project that is associated with habitat for the Plains-wanderer.

So, NSW DCCEE CPHER (or Conservation, Regulation and Heritage) programs considered the nature and extent of potential impacts of the project may result in SAI on the Plains-wanderer, and they requested further avoidance measures. Now, due to the complex nature of the species and the difference in conclusions drawn by the Applicant and by CPHER, the Department referred the matter to the Independent Expert Advisory Panel for Energy Transition for advice on whether the project would result in a serious or irreversible impact to that species.

So, the panel with a chair, a Plains-wanderer expert and a regionally experienced ecologist, considered a range of scenarios, the worst, the likely, and the best case impacts. And the panel concluded that the scale of impacts from the project would not be large enough to contribute significantly to the risk of extinction of the species. But the advice did not that with the other renewable projects proposed within the species' stronghold areas, which is where this project is located, and within the South West REZ more broadly, there was a potential for a cumulative impact of those proposals that could be more serious.

So, the Department considered all of that information, the assessment provisions of the BAM as well as the SAI guideline, the Applicant's assessment, comments from NSW DCCEE CPHER and the advice of the panel, and considered that the project's impacts would not contribute to the risk of extinction of the species. Noting that there would be significant habitat remaining at the site and across the state.

But in considering the potential for cumulative impacts on the species, where other proposals could be approved or constructed in the future, the Department's developed a bespoke condition in this instance that would require the Applicant to participate in a working group. So, the working group would be established by the independent panel and it would develop and implement a Regional Plains-wanderer Management Strategy jointly with all the relevant wind farms within the South West REZ, and that would inform appropriate avoidance and mitigation actions and consistency of monitoring in the region.

MS FITZGERALD: I must just jump in there with a question ...

MS BREWER: Sure.

MS FITZGERALD: ... if I may – a couple of questions there. The panel that's going to coordinate this regional strategy, is that the Expert Advisory Panel for Energy Transition?

MS BREWER: Yes.

MS FITZGERALD: Thanks. And Nicole, from what you said there, I think it was clear that that panel was, um, pulled together to look specifically at this project. It wasn't – that the advice that you included in the Assessment Report wasn't general to projects in the region, it was specific to this project. Is that correct?

MS BREWER: Absolutely. We requested specific advice on this project from the independent panel.

MS FITZGERALD: Thanks for that, Nicole, because we're aware that there's so many projects in this vicinity, and they've all got just slightly different densities and so on in relation to the Plains-wanderer.

And my final question, and this might be tricky to answer, but the Applicant's ecologist considered that 170 hectares of suitable habitat would be impacted. Recognising there's going to be micro-siting at the time of construction and they can, you know, they've got flexibility to move things a little bit, do you have an understanding of what being impacted actually means? It's not necessarily cleared, is it, when they say, "suitable habitat would be impacted", I'm just wondering what the nature of that impact might be?

MS BREWER: My understanding is that the habitat that was considered in the Applicant's, in the ecologist's assessment did include areas for clearing. And so, it included the vegetation communities that provide the habitat for the Plains-wanderer where there is infrastructure located. And I think in this instance they also did account for some of the, you know, like edge effects and some of those prescribed impacts in calculating that 170 hectares.

MS FITZGERALD: Okay. Thank you. So, worst case, 170 cleared, but probably more likely a proportion of that cleared and others impacted in those other ways you just described. Thanks, Nicole. Thanks, Neal.

MR MENZIES: And Suellen, I think that's a point we'll visit with the Applicant just so we've got clarity of their thinking. Nicole, the working group clearly for future wind farms, solar farms that you consider, this can be included. For the ones that are already approved, it'll be by voluntary agreement that they would get involved. Is that the Department's perception?

MS BREWER: It is. I mean, the assessment of each project has been individual and the extent to which there were impacts and the way it was considered has been different on previous projects. But, yes, that essentially that is – that would be the case, yes.

MR MENZIES: Yes, that makes sense. Thank you.

MS BREWER: Okay. In regards to bird and bat strike. So, the project also has the potential to result in impacts to birds and bats through changes in air pressure, which is barotrauma, or collision with turbines, which is the bird and bat strike.

The assessment of these impacts is dealt with in a different way to other biodiversity impacts, and they are considered prescribed impacts as opposed to that direct impact which is the clearing and habitat lost, or an indirect impact which is impacts of the predation or weed invasion. There isn't any policy on how to calculate or quantitatively assess prescribed impacts relating to barotrauma or bird and bat strike, and there's no requirement under any policy to provide biodiversity offset credits.

So, the approach adopted for these impacts across all wind farms is a combination of a risk assessment followed by post-determination adaptive management. And the risk assessment incorporates a number of conservative assumptions in calculating the relative risk associated with both the blade strike and barrier effects for bird and bat species.

The Applicant undertook a detailed assessment of threatened or key bird and bat species, of 12 bird and 17 bat species, and identified a moderate risk collision for four species – two birds and two bats. The remaining species were considered to have a minor impact risk.

So, the Department in consultation with NSW DCCEEW CPHR developed requirements for a Bird and Bat Adaptive Management Plan that would require the Applicant to carry out detailed monitoring of the bird and bat strike impacts of the project and carry out adaptive management if the impacts are higher than predicted. The Department considers that these impacts can be appropriately managed through that adaptive management approach.

Next slide, please. In relation to the conditions that the Department has recommended, the project impacts native vegetation and fauna species which would generate 15,421 ecosystem credits, and there would be 15,855 species credits. So, the Department's recommended conditions are requiring the Applicant to retire those required biodiversity offset credits prior to carrying out any works that would directly or indirectly impact those values requiring offset.

The Department's also recommended conditions allowing offset liabilities to be reduced if the Applicant can demonstrate further avoidance through micro-siting project infrastructure or refining ecological surveys for species. So, these conditions will require concurrence from the Minister for the Environment prior to determination, but the conditions have been developed in consultation with NSW DCCEEW CPHR.

The recommended conditions also require a Biodiversity Management Plan and a Plains-wanderer Management Plan to manage and minimise the impacts during construction, operation and decommissioning of the project.

The Department –

MR MENZIES: Michael, you generally jump in at that point.

MR WRIGHT: Yes, sorry, Nicole, just a question about that Plains-wanderer Management Plan. And I'm thinking back to my involvement with the Pottinger Wind Farm, and I don't think we actually had power to direct in the conditions how some of

the impacts would be offset for the Plains-wanderer, but we certainly did talk about it and encourage the proponent to consider dealing with predation, particularly fox predation, potentially breeding programs, and I think [ex-closures? 00:35:23] as well. Is there any, in terms of the Plains-wanderer Management Plan proposed, is there any intent to suggest what that might include? The intention being to hopefully ensure some of the offset is local and ideally, you know, on the project site.

MS BREWER: So, I'll answer that in two ways. I think the types of things that are our expectations for a Plains-wanderer Management Plan are specified in the recommended conditions. So, they do include things like the controlling predators and pests, and controlling weeds, doing the monitoring, and ensuring that that is – that that management plan is also consistent with that Regional Plains-wanderer Management Strategy, and that that Plains-wanderer Management Plan would also be reviewed by that working group. So, we have been specific about what we consider is required here.

In this instance, I think the recommended conditions don't provide ... They reflect the offset options that are available under the Act, and so that could be the provision of a land-based offset or payment into the trust, or could also include a SODA for the project, a strategic offset delivery agreement.

MR WRIGHT: And what – sorry, Nicole – and what might that involve? What would a SODA involve?

MS BREWER: Yes. So, this is a new ...

MR WRIGHT: Acronym.

MS BREWER: A new acronym, apologies. So, it is a new option available to applicants that meet certain requirements, and that is around certain types of projects but also projects within a REZ can, rather than them seeking to set up their own land-based offsets or paying into the trust, a strategic offset delivery agreement is an agreement between the applicant and NSW DCCEE or the environment agency head in this instance, for that agency just to find the offsets for the project.

And there are a set of regulations that have been recently developed and enacted for what needs to happen then for delivery of that strategic offset delivery agreement, and it includes having a conservation investment strategy, so the offsets are then consistent with that conservation strategy. So, it's intended to look at REZ's and find those strategic sites consistent with that conservation investment strategy. That is an option, one of others that are available under the regulation to certain projects and in particular ones within a REZ.

MR WRIGHT: Mm-hm. Excellent. Thank you. Thanks, Neal.

MR MENZIES: Thanks, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Next slide, please. So, moving onto visual impacts. The Department assessed the project against the 2016 Wind Energy Guideline, including that Visual Assessment Bulletin which forms part of the guideline. Although the new Energy

Policy Framework was finalised in November 2024, it doesn't apply to the assessment of this project as the EIS was lodged prior to that finalisation of that guideline in November 2024.

5 So, the Department's assessed the project against the performance objectives in that Visual Assessment Bulletin and considers visual magnitude, multiple wind turbine effects, landscape/scenic integrity, key feature disruption, shadow flicker, blade glint, and aviation hazard lighting. The Visual Assessment Bulletin gives guidance on the performance objectives at certain distances, known as the black and the blue line in the
10 bulletin, for turbines relevant – as it's relevant to the proposed turbine height.

So, starting with the assessment of private receivers. The project has been designed to maximise that distance from neighbouring residences, and there are no non-associated residences within the blue line of 5.9 kilometres. The nearest non-associated residence
15 is receiver 9 and it's located about 6 kilometres from the nearest turbine. The Department's assessment concluded that all the visual performance objectives would be achieved at these residences. The assessment also considered the cumulative visual impacts with the other projects, and there are four non-associated receivers that are within 8 kilometres of the Bullawah Wind Farm and the Pottinger Wind Farm (which
20 is adjacent), and all the visual performance objectives would also be achieved at those residences.

Moving onto public viewpoints. The Applicant did also assess 16 public viewpoints, that's roads and lookouts, as well as key locations such as views from the Oolambeyan Homestead and the Oolambeyan picnic area, both located in the adjoining Oolambeyan National Park. The public viewpoints within the national park, and that's located to the north, would be subject to that intervening vegetation and as such the project would not be visible. So, the Department considers that the visual performance objectives
25 would be achieved at all of those public viewpoint locations.

30 Next slide, please. Onto other matters. So, I'll now briefly address some of the other issues that were considered in the assessment. And these include soil and water, waste, hazards and risk, social and economic, heritage, noise and vibration, decommissioning, and cumulative. I'll move quite quickly through these, noting the time.

35 But if we can go to the next slide, thank you. So, in regard to soil and water. So, firstly water supply, the amount of water for the project is estimated to be around 224 megalitres of non-potable water during construction, and around 11 megalitres of potable water per year for amenities would be required in that construction period.

40 The Applicant's proposed to obtain water required for both of those sources, for construction and operation, from multiple sources, and that's proposed to include licensed groundwater supplies from the host or neighbours, from commercial suppliers, and also from harvested runoff from the site. And the Department and NSW DCCEEW and Water NSW are satisfied that that water use is unlikely to have a
45 significant impact on water supply and demand in the region, subject to them obtaining those relevant approvals and licence, and adhering to the requirements of the relevant water sharing plans.

On flooding. The area is within the broader Murrumbidgee flood plain, and detailed flood modelling was undertaken. During construction of the project, some of the temporary compounds and accommodation facilities may experience floods up to 25 centimetres deep during a 1% annual exceedance probability event. And some of the turbines could experience depths of up to 30 centimetres during that 1% AEP event. But the turbines are resistant to the flooding at the tower base up to several metres in depth, and flooding wouldn't impact the turbines.

So, the Applicant has committed to locating flood sensitive infrastructure above those probable maximum flood levels and implementing flood emergency response procedures. The recommended conditions require the Applicant to design and operate the project with consideration of that flood risk through a Flood Emergency Response Plan that must – needs to be consistent with the relevant agencies' flood emergency responses.

In regard to erosion. The project area is relatively flat and with the recommended conditions of approval, the Department considers that that erosion risk is manageable.

Onto waste. Waste during construction would predominantly be classified as general waste, the sanitary and liquid waste from site compounds and the temporary workforce accommodation, some hazardous wastes, and other waste associated with construction plant and equipment. The Applicant's committed to segregating that waste, managing it, reusing/recycling it, and by safely disposing it at appropriately licensed facilities.

In the operation of the project, there will be minimal amounts of waste except during those repair and maintenance events. During the exhibition, the Department did receive comments from the local councils, and we noted those comments received from councils and have required in the conditions, in the recommended conditions to reduce waste, recycle and dispose at a licensed facility, but also includes a Waste Management Plan. And the Department, on that basis, considers that the waste could be appropriately managed.

Next slide, please. On hazards and risks. The southern portion of the project area is mapped as bushfire prone land. The Applicant's committed to implementing the Asset Protection Zones around the project infrastructure and providing that dedicated on-site firefighting water supply. The battery was assessed through the preliminary hazards analysis and the proposed separation distances and design measures were found to be appropriate to minimise any risks.

And the Department's recommended conditions requiring the next step of those fire safety studies that is done post approval in detailed design, which is the fire safety study, as well as the Emergency Plan, and compliance with the Planning for Bushfire Protection Guidelines. And the details of those emergency procedures and emergency exit routes would be within those plans, which would need to include evidence of any required access arrangements with landowners. And so, on that basis, the Department's satisfied that the bushfire and hazard risks can be suitably controlled through those plans and procedures.

Next slide, please. Social and economic. The project would bring a range of economic benefits, from the 380 construction jobs, the ongoing operational jobs (there are around 40), and that expenditure from the workers in the area. The project would inject around \$2.5 billion into the economy, and the Applicant has also committed to a community benefit sharing that is in accordance with the current Benefit Sharing Guideline and so that is at a rate of \$1,050 per megawatt installed. So, consistent with the guideline, again, around 85% of those funds would be split with the three host councils, and then there would be 15% to a dedicated First Nations fund. And so, the terms of the benefit sharing with the three host councils have been agreed, and then would sit in a voluntary planning agreement.

MR WRIGHT: Nicole, can I just ask a question about the 2.5 billion in capital investment. I'm just curious to know how that's calculated. I mean, is the Proponent, I presume, purchasing equipment from overseas jurisdictions to import into the country, so I'm just curious to know how the \$2.5 billion is actually calculated. I don't want you to spend a lot of time talking to it, but just very briefly.

MS BREWER: Look, I think that's a combination of the direct funds where they're spending money on, you know, workers and supplies and construction materials within NSW, and the direct – sorry, and the indirect flow-on benefits.

MR WRIGHT: Yes.

MS BREWER: So, they're – yes.

MR WRIGHT: Mm.

MS BREWER: The Applicant also proposes to construct a temporary workers accommodation and that would accommodate up to 345 workers, and that's to manage those cumulative impacts on housing and short-term accommodation availability in the region and in the REZ. It would be designed and maintained in accordance with an Accommodation Camp Management Plan and also include details of the provision of health and medical services to be able to service those in the camp, and that was also a commitment made by the Applicant. They would also be required to prepare and implement an accommodation and employment strategy prioritising local workers, where possible.

The Department considers that those social and economic benefits of the project outweigh the potential negative social and economic impacts.

On heritage. So, the surveys identified 31 heritage sites, and 27 of those could be potentially impacted. There were test excavations done and Heritage NSW supported that assessment methodology and the management approach. The Applicant committed to avoiding 20 of those sites through the design, further mitigation measures, and that heritage – the potential impacts to heritage would then be managed through a Heritage Management Plan that would be prepared in consultation with Heritage NSW and the registered Aboriginal parties.

There are also recommended conditions requiring the Applicant to protect sites and pads or potential archaeological deposits that are outside the development corridor and avoid or minimise impacts on all sites and pads during detailed design. And there would be then a process of salvage and relocating those items in accordance with those plans.

In relation to historic heritage, there were two locally significant heritage items within the broader project area, but neither would be directly impacted by the project. And both would be protected through just the design of the project and exclusion zones.

Next slide.

<brief technical issue>

MR MENZIES: We couldn't miss a word there, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Okay. I'll keep going, if that's all right. At two non-associated receivers. during certain construction activities, so that's R4 and R13. There also is – the road upgrades are adjacent to hospital workers accommodation or quarters, and that's in Balranald, and they made be temporarily noise affected during those very short term road upgrade works at that intersection. The Applicant's committed to careful planning and ongoing engagement, and that might include management measures such as respite or agreed times or could include things like alternative accommodation.

The construction traffic noise would comply with the relevant guidelines, and the operational noise modelling demonstrated that they would also comply with the Noise Assessment Bulletin. In the Department's recommended conditions to restrict works to standard hours and require the Applicant to minimise noise during construction and undertake that operational noise compliance monitoring in the period at when it commences operation.

MR WRIGHT: And Nicole, can I just ask a question, going back to the advice received from National Parks about noise and vibration impacting on wildlife. I think the figure they were throwing around was anything about 40 decibels potentially has a negative impact on wildlife. It looks as though, certainly operational noise is down at 35 dB, is that, so is that matter now resolved to the satisfaction of NPWS.

MS BREWER: Ah, look, I mean I would say that there are no specific guidelines around impacts to wildlife. The Department considered that that – those potential impacts are largely during construction and so are short-term impacts and has proposed conditions around managing the impacts during that longer period during construction.

MR WRIGHT: Yes. And it looks like, based on this, that the operational noise levels will be below that – the NPWS view in any event about, you know, impact at 40 dB.

MS BREWER: Sorry, what was the question then?

MR WRIGHT: Just looking at this, your dot-point here about operational noise levels being at 35 decibels, which looks to be less than the 40 decibels that MPWS suggested was a threshold for impact.

5 **MS BREWER:** Yes. Those operational noise levels are – it's 35 dB but also with the consideration of the background noise, so the wind noise, takes account of the noisier environment when in those windy environments. So, it's a ... The modelling showed that it met the criteria at all of those non-associated receivers. But the ... I think the Department was satisfied that those, that any potential impacts to wildlife would be,
10 you know, any potential noise impacts are largely during construction, and that that's a temporary impact.

MR WRIGHT: It's temporary. I understand. Thanks.

15 **MS BREWER:** Next slide. So, just onto decommissioning. Several submissions raised concerns around decommissioning. The Department, I think, has shared its policy on, you know, that financial assurances should be not be required, and that those agreements with the host landowners should cover that, and has included those outcomes-based conditions requiring the project to be suitably decommissioned either
20 at the end of the project life or if the project's not operating for more than a year. And if the Applicant or landholder fails to meet those obligations or those outcome-based criteria, then the Department can use its enforcement powers under the Act.

25 Next slide, please. Cumulative impacts. There is potential for, and the Applicant's EIS identified a potential for the construction of the projects to coincide with the construction of several other projects at various stages in the planning system, including the ones that are approved and ones that are proposed.

30 Those cumulative impacts primarily relate to biodiversity and transport and that workforce accommodation, visual amenity and those construction activities. So, in response to those, you know, the Applicant has provided on-site accommodation to reduce that overall draw on housing supply within the region. The cumulative traffic has been considered in the assessment of the project. The cumulative visual impacts have been considered. And the Applicant's committed to coordinating those activities
35 with other projects, where possible, to minimise those cumulative amenity impacts with those nearest non-associated sensitive receivers.

40 There have been, you know, the Department has been involved in preparation of a range of cumulative impact studies, known as the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, to respond to those community concerns. And the purpose of that is to provide a shared baseline of information of the impacts of the projects across the South West REZ. And the results of those studies are due to be released in 2026.

45 The Department's considered that cumulative impact and we acknowledge that there would be some cumulative impacts if the construction periods overlap in the South West REZ, but they would be temporary in nature and manageable, or have been – and have been considered in the assessment and addressed through mitigation measures and the management plans that are proposed in the Department's recommended conditions.

Next slide. Overall, the Department's approach to conditions is to help achieve that certainty and consistency between similar projects but also adopt that outcome-focused approach. They're enforced by the Department's Compliance Branch who do regular site inspections, particularly during construction. And then there is a process of environmental audits conducted by an independent environmental auditor against the conditions of consent, and those results are reported publicly.

The recommended conditions include several bespoke conditions, many of which have been – we've discussed earlier, and they relate to the micro-siting, the timing of road upgrades, and the requirement for that intersection with – a common intersection with Pottinger Wind Farm, the Cobb Highway Jerilderie Road to be consistent with the Pottinger Wind Farm Project. And also, the bespoke conditions around the Plains-wanderer, you know, the working group and the management strategy.

And the recommended conditions are otherwise generally consistent with those for other wind farm projects. We consider that they could effectively manage the residual impacts.

Very briefly then, sorry, just to the next slide. We've evaluated the project through a comprehensive assessment process. The project's in the South West REZ. There's a strong renewable energy resource. It has connection and available connections on site to the EnergyConnect Project and to Transgrid's network. And would assist in the energy transition more broadly for the state.

The Department considers that the project achieves an appropriate balance between those benefits and other benefits to do with the community benefit sharing and balanced with the management measures and conditions that the Department's imposed or has recommended for the project, should the Commission's consideration be to determine to approve the project.

MR MENZIES: Thank you, Nicole, that was a really very comprehensive coverage and a good discussion around it as well, because we had a few questions that we'd discussed, asking you before you started, and we managed to put most of those in through the discussion.

Michael, did you cover all the things that you were concerned about?

MR WRIGHT: One last matter, Neal, from me, was around turbine size. Obviously, the on-site assessment is based on up to 100-metre length blades but obviously transport limitations at this stage particularly limited the blades to 80 metres, although that might be bumped up in the future if those third-party upgrades occur. And if that does happen and the Proponent installs the 250-metre, 100-metre blades, given the megawatt limit for the site, and basically, Neal, our discussion about what larger blades mean in terms of efficiency, would you need fewer turbines if they were larger, to get to that megawatt limit?

MS BREWER: So, the megawatt – do you mean the megawatt limit that has been granted through access?

MR WRIGHT: No, I mean the megawatt limit proposed for this consent.

MS BREWER: Okay. So, the Department hasn't recommended conditions that limit the megawatts, we've limited the number of turbines.

MR WRIGHT: Oh, okay.

MS BREWER: So, that allows flexibility within the envelope of what has been assessed for the other matters. So, they've sought approval for and we've recommended conditions approving the 141 turbines that they've requested, as long as that is within the envelope of the tip height that was requested, the 300 metres, and the blades, the 100-metre blades, with the exception of that transport route.

So, these projects are often rolled out, they can be rolled out in stages and when the applicant gets to financial investment decisions and detailed designs, we'd then be looking at what sized turbine they might be looking at. But as long as it matches the envelope that has been assessed and is at those locations that have been assessed with the micro-siting requirements, then there isn't a limit on the megawatts.

MR WRIGHT: Yes. And so, the only limit then is on the size of the BESS?

MS BREWER: It is, that's right.

MR WRIGHT: I understand. Okay. Thank you.

MR MENZIES: That was a good question, Michael, because I didn't know the answer to that one either, that's – we've learnt something new in that. And of course, it's eminently sensible, Nicole, not to limit the technologies that they might be placing there, so.

Suellen, anything else from you?

MS FITZGERALD: Just one minor point, Nicole, that came out of my reading of the – I think it was the Hay Council's comments. They seemed to me to be noting that the detailed design of the accommodation camp and potentially some other waste facilities would come back to them for approval. Now, is that your understanding of the process, or if this project/this proposal was approved, there is sufficient approval for the accommodation camp?

MS BREWER: So, the conditions require the camp strategy and that's the mechanism that would be prepared in consultation with council. But there isn't a secondary approval that's needed from council, because this application has sought approval for that accommodation facility within this application. So, you know, if approved, that accommodation facility would then not need further council approvals, but through the development of that accommodation strategy and Camp Management Plan, sorry, that management plan, that's developed in consultation with council and is where the Applicant needs to describe, you know, how they're managing water and wastewater for the – and the other kind of, like, building locations etc.

MS FITZGERALD: Thanks, Nicole, that's my understanding of it as well too; that it's not an approval process but there is some engagement requirements as they put those plans together. That was my only further question, Neal.

MR MENZIES: Yes. And Nicole, one from me, and it's a question that may be hard to answer. The decommissioning issue always comes up, you know, it's a big issue. That we don't hold bonds as you would in a mining situation really motivates some people in the public and they are concerned. You said that the Department has the ability to compel a landowner to ... How can the Department compel a landowner and how effective a fallback position is that?

MS BREWER: Thanks for the question. I know that decommissioning is a key issue for many members of the community. So, the development consent runs with the land. So, the wind farm developer would be the person enacting that consent, and so in the first instance any compliance action would be taken against the person acting on that consent, so it would be go back to the wind farm developer.

But there is also that mechanism, because a consent runs with land, but the Department expects that those agreements with the host landowners include arrangements for that decommissioning and rehabilitation and the Department's provided guidance on those, how those host landowner agreements, the things that they should consider, the rehabilitation and decommissioning and refurbishment that might be required.

MR MENZIES: Yes. It's a difficult question always, and reading through the guidance for the landholders, you know, it's clear that it should be part of their discussions. And of course, the other piece of complexity here is that it's 30 years out or maybe considerably longer if the towers are upgraded to a more modern technology of generation in the future. So, it's a complex question with, frankly without answers that we can give that are compelling to all members of the community. A lot of questions we have to answer, we don't have answers that are compelling to all members of the community, so yes.

Any last questions, fellow commissioners? No from Suellen, and no from Michael.

MR WRIGHT: Nothing else.

MR MENZIES: And no from me. So, but thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. We still are at quite an early stage in our consideration of this matter, and Nicole, we were happy to meet at this point, but it may mean that later we'll find something that we need the Department's help on and we'll come back to you at that point. But right now, we're still coming up to speed with a fairly big and complex proposal.

MS BREWER: Understood. The Department would be happy to provide any further assistance that might be required.

MR MENZIES: Of course, yes. We always get great help out of you, and it's appreciated. Okay. Thank you very much, team.

MR WRIGHT: Thanks, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Thanks, everybody.

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>THE MEETING CONCLUDED