

WARRUMBUNGLE SHIRE COUNCIL 5 JUNE 2024

SPEECH BY MAYOR DOOLAN TO THE INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION EXAMINING THE PROPOSED BIRRIWA SOLAR FARM PROJECT

Good morning, Commissioners and welcome to wonderful Dunedoo. My name is Ambrose Doolan and I am privileged to be the Mayor of the local Warrumbungle Shire Council.

Dunedoo was established by European settlers in 1841. The name 'Dunedoo' is probably derived from a Wiradjuri word for 'swans' which can be sighted in the lagoons around the town. I hope you've seen the beautiful silo painting of jockey Hugh Bowman and the majestic mare Winx. Is a sight to behold!

When it comes to the state significant project assessment and determination process, those who have the power are the State Government agencies and the Developers. From our experience, the views of Councils and local residents seem to be generally given little credence. Council urges this IPC deliberation to be different, to actually hear the local voices and act to deliver the changes requested.

Furthermore, Council calls on the IPC to defer a final decision on the proposed Birriwa Solar project until such time as the cumulative impacts of more than 40 large scale wind and solar and transmission projects across or adjacent to the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone are adequately identified and the environmental, social and economic costs are properly compensated.

Warrumbungle Shire is a rural region. The economic, social and cultural scene is rural to its bootstraps. In November 2021 the NSW Government established the REZ and now plans to build 6 gigawatts of energy generation here. Interestingly, there was negligible engagement with Local Government about the details of the REZ or the likely flow-on consequences.

Within or adjacent to the Warrumbungle Shire southern boundary there are currently ten proposed generation projects, including Birriwa Solar Farm. The proposed EnergyCo transmission line is also in the Shire. Approximately 10,000 construction workers are expected to be stationed in the REZ from 2026 to 2030.

There are adverse cumulative impacts arising from the 40+ projects. These relate to roads, health and emergency services, solid and liquid waste

management, water and aggregate supplies and accommodation, given not all of those associated with the REZ will live on the worker camps.

A key issue for Council and its communities is confining the project-related traffic to those roads prescribed in the consent as the only roads permitted to be used. The developer will be responsible for the upgrade and 'make good' provisions of the prescribed traffic routes.

However, based on experience, what happens is 'minor roads' or 'back roads' - roads that are of gravel construction, often winding and only designed for minimal traffic movements - become the 'short cuts' or 'rat runs' with the additional traffic causing untold damage. Leaving the ratepayers to carry the fix-up costs. This is inequitable and unjust.

The DPHI Assessment Report states there are *16 REZ projects within 25 kms of the Birriwa project site* (page 5 para 11). Yet, bewilderingly, it goes on to say there will be *'no material cumulative traffic impacts on the state or local road network as a result of the project'* (page 25 para 111). Council strongly disagrees with that conclusion.

Council urges the IPC to interrogate the developer and the DPHI on how traffic will be regulated to actually stay on the prescribed roads and not use other, non-approved routes. The community needs to know what compliance measures have been mandated and how will they be enforced? We need to see online, in real time, the traffic movements associated with all local roads within proximity to the Birriwa Solar project. The public availability of the data will help with transparency and accountability and help safeguard those road assets that are the province of Local Government.

On this matter we suggest the consent condition addition: *The Applicant shall take all reasonable steps to enforce and demonstrate compliance with the use of the prescribed transport routes to the satisfaction of TfNSW and the local Councils. Such compliance measures may include, inter alia, monitoring of individual vehicles with GPS and geofences, active surveillance, incentivisation and disciplinary actions and monthly lodgement of electronic compliance reports with the Councils.*

Council has made representations to DPHI to this effect (comments on draft conditions) but appear to have been ignored.

In conclusion, the scope and magnitude of the change being contemplated to be imposed on our communities and region rates with that of the Hunter Valley coal and power generation developments. Irrefutably the change will be significant.

Council calls on the IPC to show leadership from the outset of this proposed land use change and ensure the developers and the State carry the environmental, social and economic costs, not the local population.

Thus, in conclusion, I repeat, we call on the IPC to defer a final decision on the proposed Birriwa Solar project until such time as this issue is satisfactorily resolved.

I table for your consideration suggested amendments to the DPHI's recommended Conditions of Consent pertaining to roads and traffic.

(SEE OVER PAGE – no need to talk about them. Just hand copy to IPC).

WSC's Recommended alterations to the Conditions of Consent drafted by DPHI

Definitions:

The 'Construction' definition currently expressly excludes 'road upgrades or maintenance works'. WSC suggests it include 'road works/road upgrades' as such works are a pivotal and an early component of construction activity.

A10. Protection of Public Infrastructure:

Currently expressly excludes 'upgrade and maintenance of the road network'. This is considered an error and its omission diminishes the importance of road infrastructure. WSC suggests the last sentence in italics be deleted.

B4: Access Route:

Rather than use of the word '*avoid the use of*', after the word '*development*', WSC suggests have it read '*are prohibited from*'. (Reason? Is a more definite term and is necessary to better safeguard the roads listed).

B6: Road Upgrades:

Suggest add in the following:

- a) That the **technical specification** for the road upgrades is designed to the pavement standard of 1×10^6 ESA or equivalent. (Reason? The subgrade and aggregate base course to some of the local roads may not have been designed to said standard and thus simply placing a bitumen seal on top is unlikely to present a fit-for-purpose road that will survive the rigours of the forecast heavy vehicle use).
- b) **Defect Liability Maintenance Period (DLMP):** Suggest add '*For any road asset constructed or modified under this consent which is an asset of Council, the consent holder shall have a 24-month DLMP obligation commencing from the date the works are deemed 'practically complete' by Council. During the DLMP the consent holder is responsible for repair of any defects and maintenance of the asset in accordance with best practice standards, at no cost to Council.*
- c) **Post construction documentation:** Suggest add '*For Council road assets, the consent holder will provide electronic copies of the relevant inspection and test results, conformance surveys and Works-As-Executed (WAE) drawings to Council's satisfaction. As far as is practicable the WAE information is to be recorded on the original design drawings and plotted or scanned to portable document format.*

B11: Traffic Management Plan (TMP):

Suggest the TMP to be required to be 'approved' by both Councils rather than prepared 'in consultation' with Councils. Reason? Local roads are the responsibility of Local Government under the Roads Act thus 'approval' is more appropriate.

Sub-point (d)

- The word '*minimising*' is used regularly. Council suggests it be replaced with '*prevent to the maximum extent reasonably possible*'. Reason? 'Minimise' is a subjective term and not quantifiable and thus understates the significance of what is at stake.

- (viii) Suggest add in '*employee shuttle buses*' along with carpooling and ride sharing.
- Add in additional point to the list regarding measures to monitor traffic compliance performance in relation to the roads prescribed for use and those not prescribed. Suggest '*The Applicant shall take all reasonable steps to enforce and demonstrate compliance with the prescribed transport routes to the satisfaction of TfNSW and the local Councils. Such compliance measures may include, inter alia, monitoring of individual vehicles with GPS and geofences, active surveillance, incentivisation and disciplinary actions and monthly lodgement of electronic compliance reports with the Councils.*'

END