

Stephen Barry
Planning Director
Office of the Independent Planning Commission NSW
Suite 15.02, Level 15, 135 King Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Stephen,

Muswellbrook Solar Farm – Response to questions on notice

OX2 is pleased to provide detailed responses to the questions raised by the Independent Planning Commission (Commission) following the Commission's meeting with the Applicant on Thursday 16 January 2025.

(a) Visual impact

The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment prepared by EMM (dated 30 May 2023) states that the future Muswellbrook Bypass “is likely to increase the total visual impact from sites to the east and south of the southern array”. Please provide information on how visual impacts may be increased as a result of the bypass, and what mitigation measures may be required to address any increased visual impacts arising?

A response to the question above is provided in Attachment A.

(b) Local employment

The Environmental Impact Statement prepared by EMM (dated 7 July 2023) indicates that up to 54% of construction workers will be sourced locally. Please provide further details on how this percentage was calculated or projected, as well as the steps planned to achieve this target.

OX2 is committed to maximising the positive contributions of the project to the local and regional economy through local employment and procurement.

Workforce and Employment Projections

Details on the assumed construction workforce breakdown are provided in Section 3.2.4 of the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) (Appendix G of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)). Up to 54% of the construction workforce is expected to be sourced locally and regionally. This is based on OX2's experience with renewable energy projects in Australia, as well as considering the local social baseline information to assess the likelihood of workers availability in this particular region.

The SIA indicates that in 2021, the top three occupations in the local and regional areas were technicians and trade workers, machinery operators and drivers, and labourers (EIS document, Appendix G, p. 66). The industry, business and occupational structure of the SIA Study Area (Muswellbrook and Singleton LGAs) is therefore well-suited to a project of this scale and nature.

Information on the existing workforce demographic is provided in Section 6.14.2iia of the EIS. This assessment indicates that the Study Area has a labour force of 9,070 resident workers occupied in construction-related activities. Therefore, the project should not present a constraint to labour supply in the local economy with the projects labour requirement representing less than 1% of the local construction-related workforce.

Local Employment Strategy

To achieve the anticipated local workforce targets, a Local Employment Strategy has been developed and will be refined as the project progresses (EIS document, Appendix P, p. 11). The strategy includes:

- Partnering with the Industry Capability Network (ICN) to maximize opportunities during the pre-construction phase.
- Collaborating with regional economic development and industry groups, as well as training providers.
- Engaging with Muswellbrook Shire Council and the local business community.
- Establishing partnerships with Aboriginal businesses.
- Collaborating with St Hellier's correctional facility.

Business Engagement

OX2 has actively engaged with the local business community by:

- Joining the Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce to foster connections and establish itself within the regional business network.
- Collaborating with BlackRock Industries, a 100% Indigenous-owned company based in the Hunter Valley, which has facilitated introductions to other local businesses including Brightlands Living (Accommodation developer) and KCE (civil contractor).
- Participating in the Second Chance for Change Program Steering Committee through BlackRock.

Voluntary Planning Agreement

As part of the Voluntary Planning Agreement with Muswellbrook Shire Council, OX2 will provide a procurement plan demonstrating local expenditure, subject to the Council's approval.

Yours Sincerely,

Carla Evans
Senior Development Manager
OX2



Attachment A



23 January 2025

Stephen Barry
Planning Director
Office of the Independent Planning Commission

Re: Muswellbrook Solar Farm SSD 46543209 - Visual impact

Dear Stephen,

I refer to the Independent Planning Commission's (IPC) letter dated 20 January 2025 with respect to questions on notice for the Applicant of Muswellbrook Solar Farm (SSD 46543209). A response to the following matter was requested:

a) Visual impact

The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment prepared by EMM (dated 30 May 2023) states that the future Muswellbrook Bypass "is likely to increase the total visual impact from sites to the east and south of the southern array". Please provide information on how visual impacts may be increased as a result of the bypass, and what mitigation measures may be required to address any increased visual impacts arising?

The Muswellbrook Solar Farm Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) states that "The [Muswellbrook] bypass is likely to increase the total visual impact from private and roadway sites to the east and south of the southern solar array" in Table 9.1, which lists the potential cumulative visual impacts caused by projects near the solar farm. The statement simply means visual impacts are likely to increase for receptors who have views of the solar arrays and are located east and south of the solar array due to the addition of views of the bypass. When the bypass is constructed, it is likely that receptors south of the solar farm will be able to see the solar farm as well as the bypass, creating a cumulative impact scenario. Receptors to the east would be unlikely to have views of the solar farm (see Section 4.2, and Table 6.4 of the LVIA) as project infrastructure would likely be screened by topography and vegetation.

Section 9.2 of the LVIA describes the visual impacts and assesses the cumulative impacts from Viewpoints 6, 7, 8 and 9 which are located south of the solar farm. The findings were as follows:

- Viewpoint 6 (Section 9.2.1) - The combined visual impacts would result in a low visual impact. No mitigation is necessary.
- Viewpoint 7 and 8 (Section 9.2.2) - Potential for cumulative impacts is very low due to the views being blocked by landform and vegetation. No mitigation is necessary.

- Viewpoint 9 (Section 9.2.3) - Visual impact from the solar farm was rated as very low. The bypass will also block views of the solar farm, negating the visual impact of the solar farm. No mitigation from the solar farm is necessary.

Subsequent to the LVIA referred to above, an addendum to the LVIA was issued in July 2024 (Addendum 2). The addendum identified Viewpoints 10, 11, and 13 as having potential visual impacts from the bypass. These are all located within the Woodland Ridge residential community, south of the solar farm. The anticipated impact caused by the addition of the bypass would be as follows:

- Viewpoint 10 - A low visual impact rating, no additional impact as views are constrained to a narrow corridor by existing trees. No mitigation is necessary.
- Viewpoint 11 - Most of the view toward the solar arrays are blocked by structures and trees. There is potential for the bypass to be visible, but the cumulative impact would remain low. No mitigation is necessary.
- Viewpoint 13 - Portions of the bypass would be visible, however the magnitude rating would remain low, keeping the visual impact rating at low. No mitigation is necessary.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Summersby
Senior Environmental Engineer

