

Our ref: SSD-10346

Prof Mary O'Kane
Chair
Independent Planning Commission
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20/9/2023

Subject: Oxley Solar Farm – Referral to the Independent Planning Commission

Dear Professor O'Kane

The Department has completed its assessment of the merits of the application for the Oxley Solar Farm (SDD 10346).

The application is referred to the Independent Planning Commission for determination as there were more than 50 unique submissions objecting to the proposal.

Oxley Solar Development Pty Ltd (OSD) proposes to develop a new State significant solar farm located approximately 14 kilometres (km) southeast of Armidale in the Armidale Regional Local Government Area.

The project would have a generating capacity of approximately 215 megawatts (MW) and a 50 MW / 50 MWh battery energy storage system. The project would connect to TransGrid's existing 132 kilovolt transmission lines, which traverse the site.

During the exhibition of the environmental impact statement (EIS), the Department received a total of 79 submissions from the community and special interest groups, in addition to advice from 15 government agencies. Of the public submissions, 78 objected to the project, of which 76 were unique submissions. Armidale Regional Council also commented on the project.

After reviewing the submissions, OSD made a number of changes to the project to address issues raised in submissions, including:

- reducing the development footprint by 627 ha (from 895 ha to 268 ha);
- increasing the setback of the development footprint from the closest residence (R5) by 181 m;
- removed panels from the southwest of the site to increase setback of solar arrays from residences to the west, and the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park to the south;
- decreasing impacts to Box Gum Woodland (woodland vegetation) by 4.07 ha (from 6.67 ha to 2.6 ha);
- reducing the removal of hollow bearing trees from 20 to 7;

- relocating the primary site access point from Waterfall Way (Grafton Road) to a new access point off the Armidale Regional Landfill access road, to address road safety concerns; and
- revised upgrades to the Gara Road/River Causeway to improve road safety, fish passage, amenity and flood immunity.

Under the delegation from the consent authority (i.e. the Commission for this development), the Department accepted the amended application for the reasons outlined in the Assessment Report.

OSD also offered to enter into a voluntary planning agreement with Armidale Regional Council to contribute towards community enhancement projects in the local area, which has been agreed in principle.

The Department has considered this information in detail during its assessment and supports the proposed amendments as they would significantly reduce the impacts of the project and address some of the key issues raised by the community in submissions.

In assessing the merits of the project, the Department has considered the environmental, social and economic impacts of the project, submissions on the EIS, relevant environmental planning instruments, the suitability of the site, and the public interest, in accordance with the requirements of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

During the assessment process the Department visited the site, and consulted with local residents, Council and relevant government agencies.

Based on this assessment, the Department considers that the project is approvable, subject to the recommended conditions of consent.

I have attached a copy of the Department's assessment report and other relevant documents for the Commission's consideration.

If you have any questions, please contact Iwan Davies on 02 9274 6296 or via email at iwan.davies@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Iwan Davies

**Director
Energy Assessments**