



**NAME REDACTED**

**OBJECT**

Submission No: 188941

Organisation:		Key issues: <i>Land use compatibility, Visual impacts, Community benefit, Cumulative impacts</i>
Location:	<i>Australian Capital Territory 2615</i>	
Submitter Type:	<i>an individual making a submission on my own behalf</i>	
Attachment:	<i>walaroo solar farm submission no cover sheet.pdf</i>	

Submission date: 7/28/2024 1:39:40 PM

Dear Commission,

*I am writing to assert my objection to the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm.*

*I have already provided a written submission, attached for your reference.*

*In your guide to making a submission you state that previous public submissions have already been taken into account in the Department's Report/Recommendations. However, a summary of the concerns, whilst easier for you to consider, do not take true levels of distress into account. The concerns have been responded to by the applicant whose self-interest drives their counter-arguments and weaponises our distress. This has the appearance of fairness but in effect gives the applicant all the power, which leaves individuals feeling powerless and hopeless. I therefore encourage you to read each individual objection rather than just a summary.*

*The development is akin to placing an industrial facility in the middle of an established suburb. I urge the Commission to not only rely on written documents or submissions. I strongly encourage you visit West Belconnen Pond in-person to see the true impact that the proposed development will have on the community. I understand that the Department inspected 'sensitive receivers' and argues that the majority of homes affected will have their view blocked by existing urban structures. However, this does not reflect the true use of the area. Not one of the photos provided by the Applicant is taken from the circuit around the West Belconnen Pond! Hundreds of people use this circuit each week and they don't necessarily live in the areas considered to have high visual impact from the project. So, meeting only with 'sensitive receivers' does not take into account the true community impact! Thousands of people who use the pond for recreation each year will be detrimentally affected.*

*I plead for the Commission to please come to Dunlop, set a time to meet with the community (perhaps invite people to attend via signage around the pond) and take a walk around the pond (a 2.6km circuit) and see for yourself how close the development will be to the pond and people's homes. Please see Page 9 of my original submission which seems to have been completely ignored by the Department. West-Belconnen Pond is only a short drive from Murrumbateman and the easy-paced walk around the pond only takes 30 minutes. If the Applicant/Developer were willing to come too and provide an outline of the area of the proposed development (akin to high visibility tape and maybe some way to demonstrate height of the development) it would be an act of good faith in their willingness to be honest (as this is not the current impression).*

*The Department says that the project is compatible with the use of the land, however, the use of the land is largely residential and if the project goes ahead residential development will be intentionally limited. Doesn't this suggest that regulations recognise that it is not appropriate to build residential properties near a solar farm (so then, shouldn't the reverse be true, that it is not acceptable to build a solar farm in close proximity to an already established residential area). Doesn't it also suggest that the project is actually incompatible with the use of the land! If the suburb of Dunlop was within NSW would this project even be*



*possible, wouldn't it breach NSW planning regulations? This treats the people of Dunlop and surrounding suburbs as second-class citizens. We are real people. We struggle to earn a living, pay our expenses, put food on the table and raise our children, we are tax-payers, but because of a nearby, invisible border we are treated differently.*

*The Department argues that the impact on visual amenity and landscape character is low and that vegetation screening will mitigate these impacts. It says that the solar panels will be 'low lying' quoting a height of 4.73m. However, these assertions, again, do not consider the true use of the area around West Belconnen Pond. The Department has not inspected impacts from viewpoints around the pond. If walking in an anti-clockwise direction, and on the gravel track nearest the border, the views provide a beautiful rural outlook leading the eye over grasslands, green hills and then upwards towards the mountains. So, if the project goes ahead this will be immediately lost because the grasslands and hills will be covered in solar panels higher than a two-storey house covering almost 1.5 square kilometres! The vegetation screen will obscure the view of the solar panels but the outlook itself will be completely lost!*

*The recreational amenities of the pond provide a connection to nature and act to reduce the stresses of everyday life thus enhancing quality of life and wellbeing. The development will substantially alter the visual landscape, it will be a blight on the outlook. If the development goes ahead residents and users of the area will have to bear the loss, and the grief will be intergenerational. I will be long gone by the time the site is decommissioned and my children will be middle-aged to elderly.*

*Mental health care costs local and Federal governments billions of dollars per year. I have no doubt that my mental health will deteriorate if the solar farm is placed so close to the area I use every day for exercise, connection to nature and recreation. I am sure that I won't be the only person to suffer.*

*<https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/expenditure>*

*<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/>*

*Is the Commission willing to risk the mental health of thousands of people who use the pond for recreation, exercise and wellbeing each year? Is the benefit of the few (the Applicant) to the detriment of the many really in the public interest?!*

*I understand that the Commission needs to use logical arguments and evidence to inform its decision but this should not mean ignoring the distress that people are feeling about this development. If the Commission needs to see an economic cost to consider arguments about distress please refer to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare link above. The distress is real and the cost is real (emotional, psychological and economical).*

*Additionally, a significant number of Dunlop homes already have their own solar panels so will not benefit at all from electricity generated by the project. From this perspective, the development will only directly benefit the Applicant and foreign owner. What happens if the company goes broke, what recourse is there for local residents so substantially and negatively impacted by the development? Who will be responsible for decommissioning?*

*It seems that the land owners and foreign company will benefit while huge mental health and wellbeing costs are imposed on their neighbours. This represents a significant impact on the local community. It is unfair and it is un-Australian!*

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**I object to the building of the Wallaroo Solar Farm SSD-9261283**

**Name of the project and application number**

Wallaroo Solar Farm  
SSD-9261283

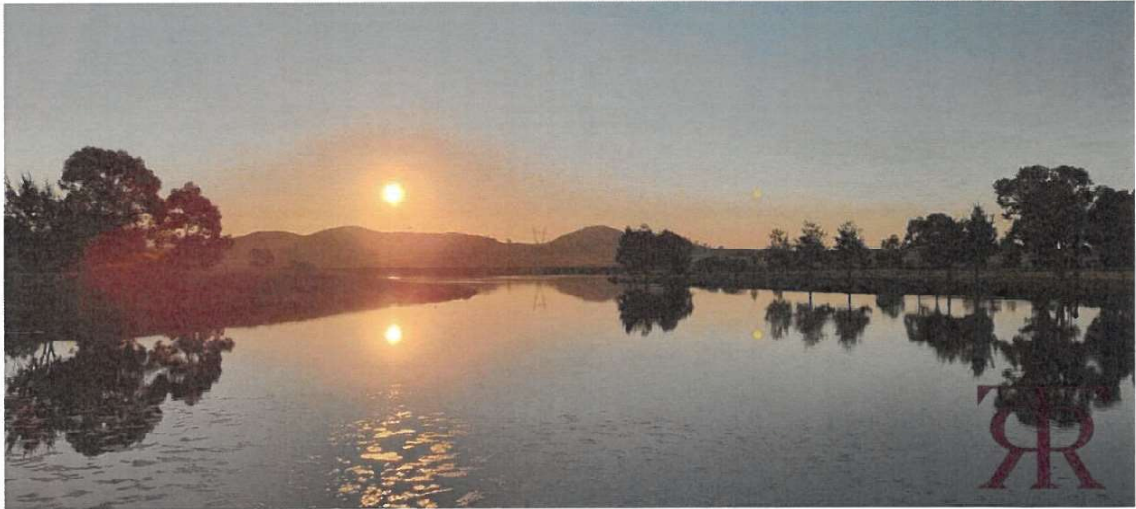
**I object to the application**

Reasons I **object** to the application:

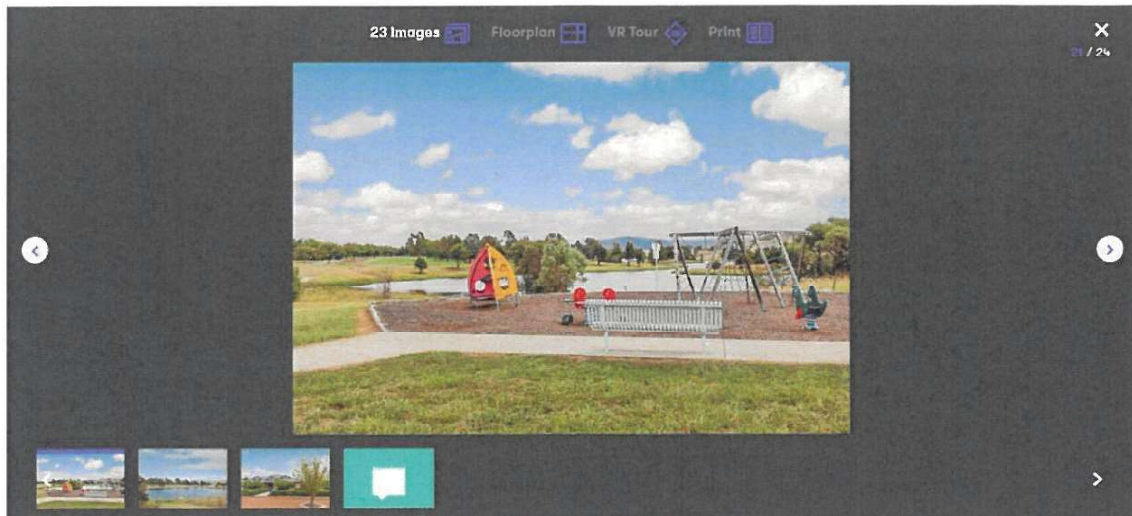
The site of the solar farm is far too close to suburban residences. This will have an impact on land values and local amenity. The development will have an adverse visual impact to local residences. Families and households already struggling in the current cost of living crisis cannot afford to have the value of their homes drop in the context of rising interest rates. Financial pressure is already stressful enough without the threat of loss of value of the family home. The proximity of Dunlop to rural land and the West Belconnen Pond increases the attractiveness and value of homes in the area as demonstrated by the photos below published in real estate ads:











The value of our homes will be threatened if the development is approved to go ahead in the current location.

Loss of amenity: The proximity of the development to West Belconnen Pond will mean a substantial loss of amenity in the area. The pond is surrounded by paths (both sealed and unsealed) with a 2.6km track all the way around it. The pond and its paths are used by hundreds of people each week and not just people who live close by. It is used by residents who live close to it in Dunlop, residents who live in other parts of Dunlop and residents from other nearby suburbs. I have seen mini-buses of people who are elderly and people with disabilities disembark at the pond so that they can enjoy the peaceful environment and magnificent views. The pond is used by walkers and joggers, people walking or jogging with their dogs, bike riders, horse riders, birdwatchers, anglers and photographers. There are playgrounds, BBQ facilities, seating benches, shelters and a basketball court. The enjoyment in the use of these facilities will be significantly marred if the solar farm is to go ahead in the currently proposed location.

A Google search demonstrates just a selection of groups who benefit from the amenity provided by West Belconnen Pond.

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/australia/australian-capital-territory/west-belconnen-pond-loop-via-bicentennial-national-trail>



<https://www.actwfp.org.au/photo-gallery/2022/west-belconnen-pond-17-november-2022/>

<https://www.canberratracks.act.gov.au/heritage-trails/track-6-belconnen/border-walk>



<http://canberrabirds.org.au/trips/walk-west-belconnen-pond/>

The solar farm would substantially negatively impact the character and appearance of the landscape. The viewpoints submitted by the developer do not take into account the true use of the area. There are no viewpoints on the paths closest to the pond and none from the border side of the pond which is very widely used. This seems deliberately deceptive so that they can have their project approved.

Similarly, the views submitted by the developer have largely been rated as Low Scenic Quality which is a misrepresentation of the true value of the land. Views from the pond, and especially on the track/path closest to the border are not represented. I believe these views could objectively be rated at least at a moderate scenic quality but really when I look across the grasslands, over the hills and to the mountains and ranges beyond I subjectively see them to be of high scenic quality!

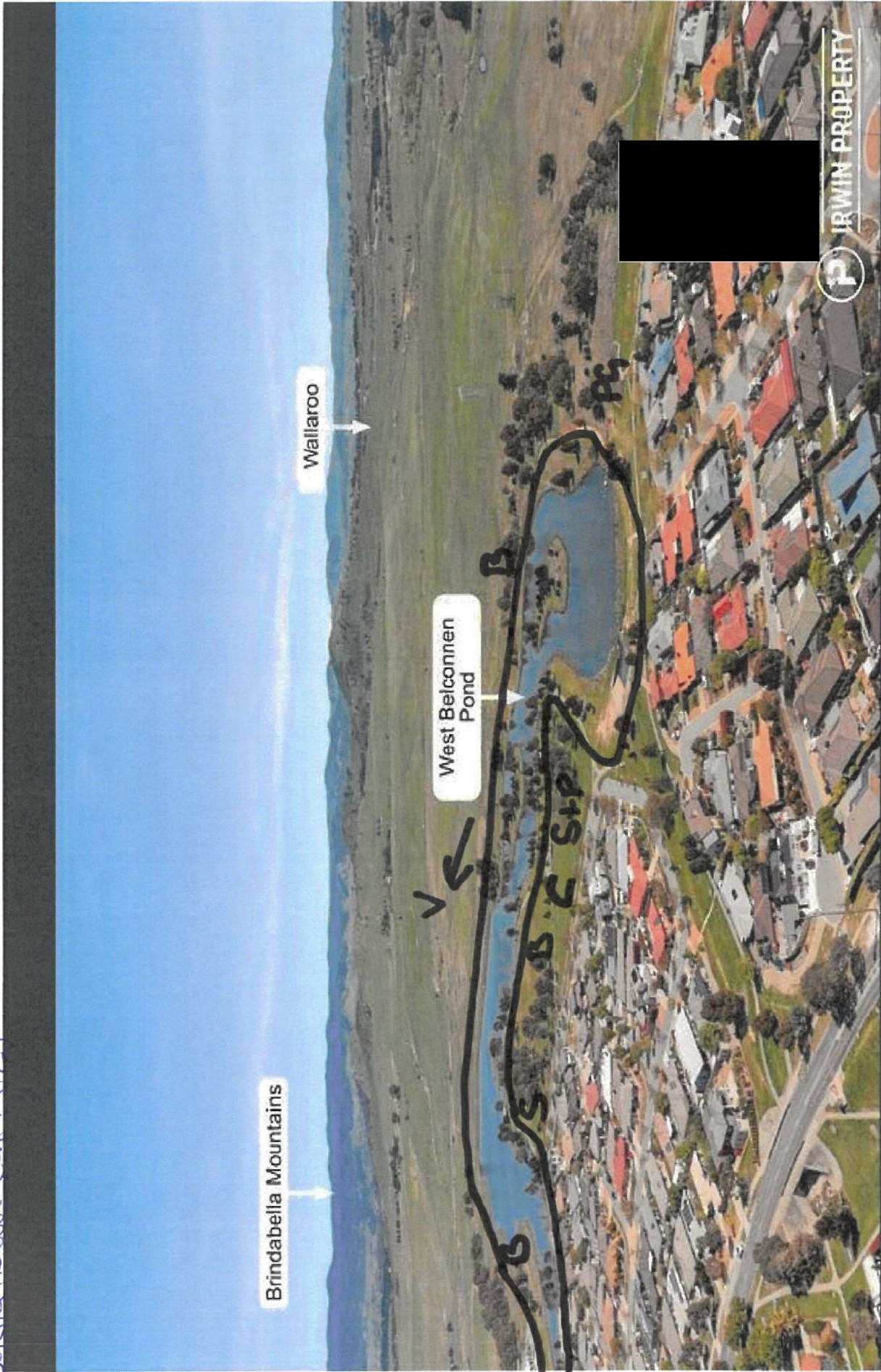
If the development goes ahead the views will be lost forever. This is not an exaggeration because even after the farm is decommissioned the vegetation screen will remain forever blocking the previously wonderful views.

I walk my dog most days around the pond and having solar panels up to 4 metres high (this height was quoted at one of the community meetings) in close proximity will significantly detract from the experience.


Please see the next few pages which represent the true use of the area, the proposed location of the Wallaroo Solar Farm which you will see is extremely close to residences and the West Belconnen Pond, and finally, the view points I suggest that the developer submit to the DPE in order to provide a true representation of the use of the area and the true proximity of the proposed solar farm on the community.

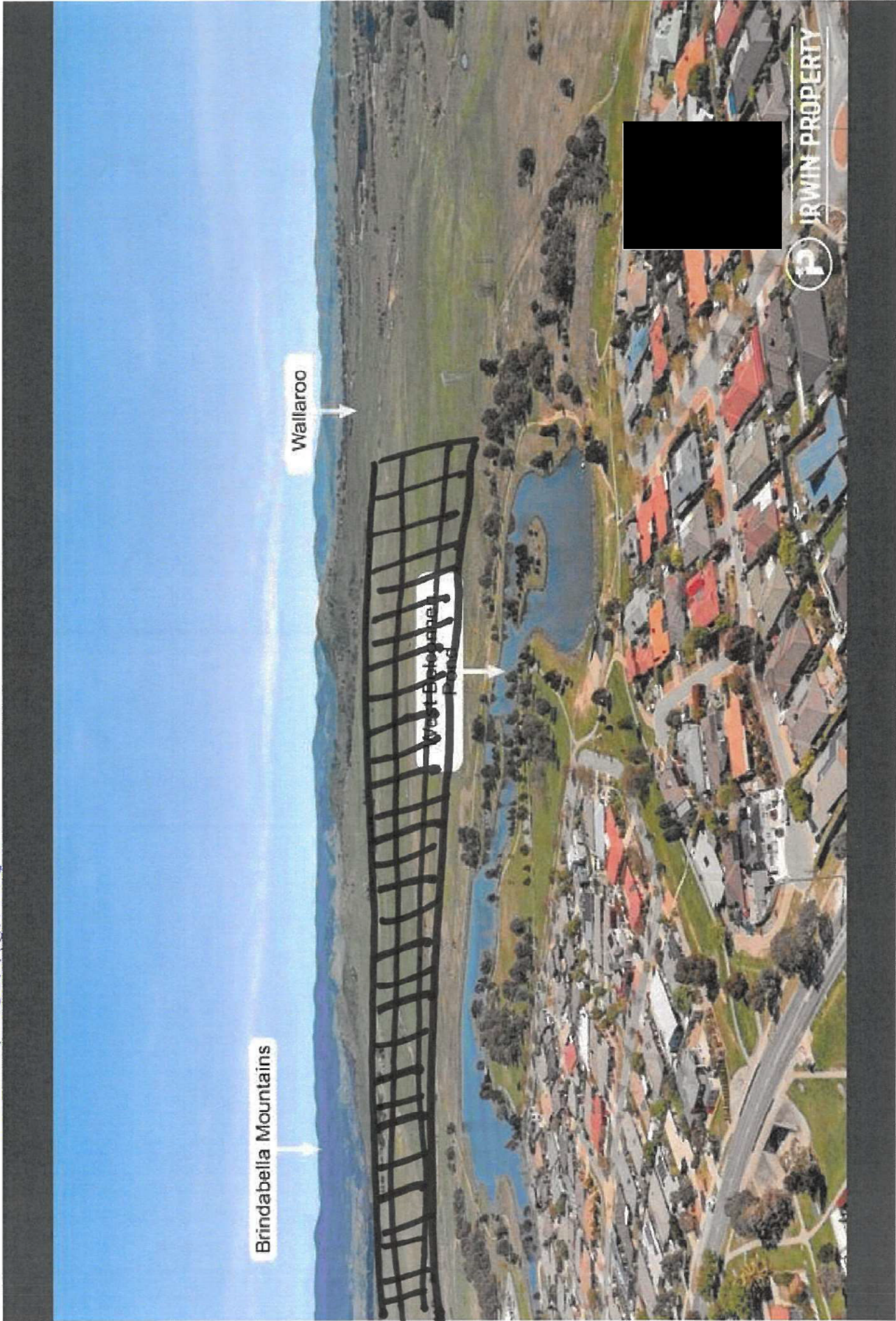


- \* PG = Playgrounds
- \* BBA = Barbeque facilities
- \* S = Shelters
- \* C = Basketball court (1/2)
- \* B = Benches
- \* S+P = Shelter + Heritage Plaque commemorating "One Tree Hill"
- \* V = View over grasslands to the Brindabella's

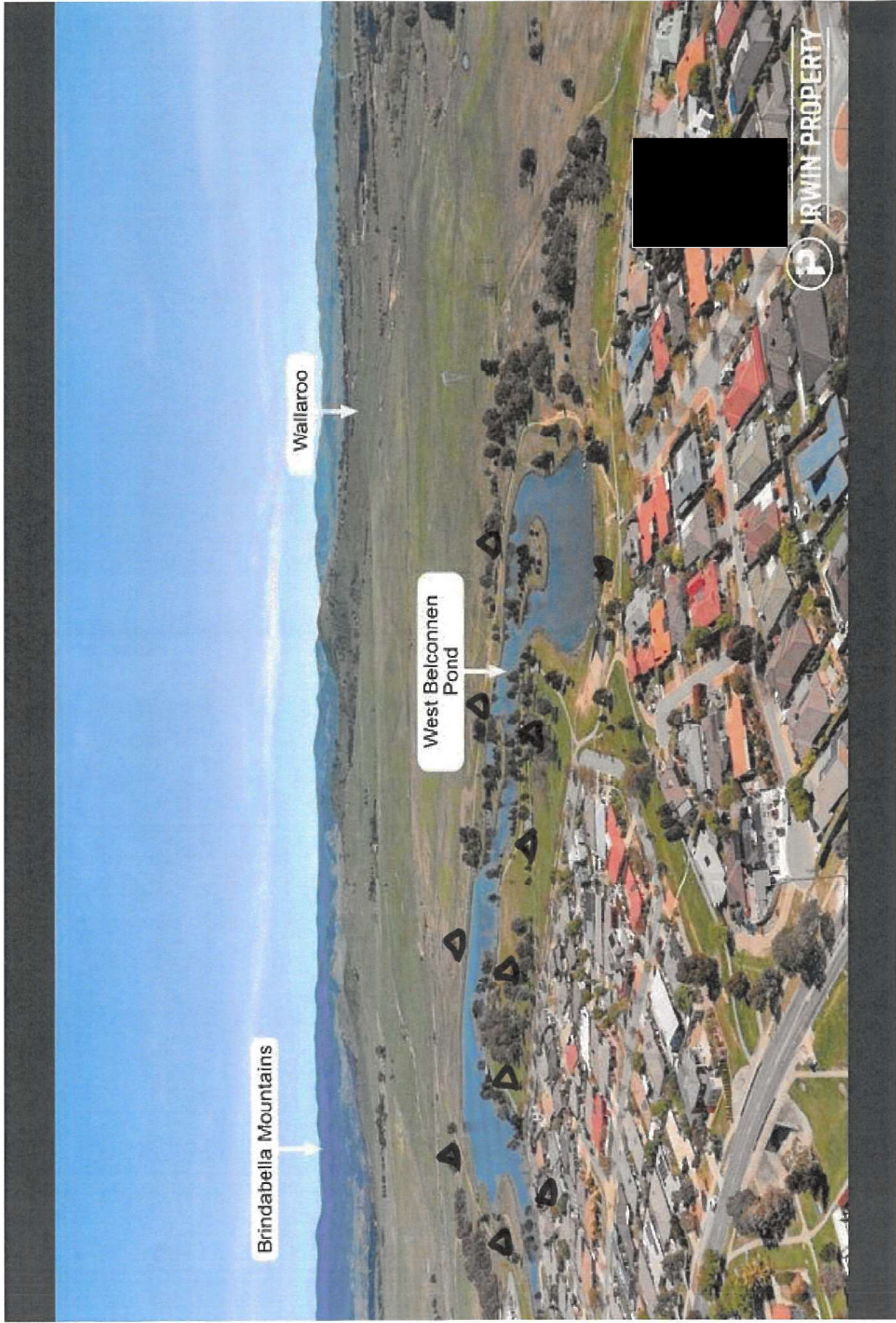


PG  
BBA  
S

 = Proposed solar farm, extremely close to residences, would completely intercept views across the grasslands + towards the mountains!



The only viewpoint relevant to the pond submitted to the DPE  
Recommended viewpoints, in both directions (i.e. clockwise + counterclockwise)



Impact on mental health and wellbeing: The pond allows people to enjoy a healthy lifestyle and connection to nature which contribute to overall mental health and wellbeing. The significantly negative visual impact of the solar farm will change the ambience of the area from very pleasant rural/mountain views to an industrial appearance. Currently the eyeline travels across the grasslands, towards the hills and then up to the mountains. If the solar farm goes ahead in the currently proposed location it will create a huge eyesore and detract substantially from the current inspiring views. This will lead to the substantially reduced mental health and wellbeing of the local community. I myself have already experienced sleepless nights, anxiety, stress and distress just at the thought of the views I enjoy every day being spoiled by the construction of this solar farm.

Impact on wildlife: With fencing around the solar farm the large population of local kangaroos will be displaced and there may be impacts on much other wildlife such as turtles, frogs and the large array of birdlife. I'm also not so sure that the land is not suitable for farming as I have often certainly seen cattle grazing right up to the border!

Heritage impact: The proposed site of the solar farm will impact on both the Bicentennial National Trail and One Tree Hill. I don't know much about heritage laws but surely a huge solar farm on or near a heritage sight would be prohibited and would significantly reduce enjoyment of these areas of national significance.

<https://nationaltrail.com.au/>

<https://museum.hall.act.au/display/1939/place/2000/one-tree-hill.html>

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/australia/australian-capital-territory/one-tree-hill-via-canberra-centenary-trail>

Environmental impact: Solar farms can increase the local temperatures and may put the local area and residences at risk of severe storms, property damage and increased insurance premiums. Lithium batteries can release toxins into the environment if they overheat or catch fire potentially putting local residents at risk of exposure to these toxins. The farm site is part of the Murrumbidgee catchment.

In NSW it is not permissible to site a solar farm within 5km of residential land: This development is less than 2km from residential land and in some places it is only a few hundred metres from residential land. It would be extremely unfair if the development were to go ahead in the current location just because the residential land is on the other side of the border.

It is unneighbourly: The local farms/farmers will profit from this venture whilst their over-the-border neighbours will bear all the costs (loss of home value, loss of amenity, reduced mental health and wellbeing). Additionally, the farms/farmers will continue to enjoy the benefits of the use of ACT facilities such as roads, schools, hospitals, shops and transport whilst none of their taxes come into the ACT. This genuinely feels like they are "thumbing their noses" at us, they do not seem to care that their ACT neighbours will be substantially negatively affected by the location of their solar farm.

No benefit to Dunlop residents: Many homes in Dunlop already have solar panels on their roofs and therefore would not benefit at all from the electricity generated by this solar farm. The wider Canberra community will not benefit because any reduction in greenhouse gases will be attributed to NSW not the ACT.

Foreign owned company: Whilst there is no doubt the local farmers will benefit from an additional income stream the profits of this venture will go to foreign owners. The evident lack of consideration of the true impact of the location of the solar farm on ordinary people shows that they are more interested in profit than people.

Overwhelming documentation: In preparing for this submission I had planned to read all the documents provided however I now realise that there is no hope of this before the submission deadline. The amount of documentation is overwhelming to the average person. Is this meant to make us feel powerless to respond (I definitely feel disempowered and wonder whether submissions from the public will truly be taken into consideration)?

Come and see for yourself: As stated above the submissions made by the developer do not represent the true use of the area nor the consequent impacts of their solar farm. I genuinely invite you, Nestor and Andy, to morning tea at my place. We can go for a walk around the pond and you will see firsthand the potential losses that will be sustained by the local residents if this development goes ahead.

Overall, I believe that the solar farm should be relocated out of sight of residences and out of sight of the West Belconnen Pond. If it goes ahead in the currently proposed location the overwhelmingly negative impact on residents, the community, wildlife and the environment will be too great!

I declare that I have not made any political donations in the last two years.

I acknowledge and accept the Department's (NSW Department of Planning and Environment) disclaimer and declaration.