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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

TRANSCRIPT IN CONFIDENCE

O/N H-1398929

INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING WITH APPLICANT

RE: CULCAIRN SOLAR FARM STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

PANEL:	**ANDREW HUTTON (Chair)** **PROF ZADA LIPMAN**
COMMISSION SECRETARIAT:	**JANE ANDERSON (Senior Planning Officer)** **STEPHEN BARRY (Director)**
APPLICANT:	**GARTH HERON** **JOANNA MURPHY** **LISA STIEBEL** **MICHELLE CROKER** **MICHAEL COOK** **NICOLA SMITH** **LISA HAMILTON**
LOCATION:	**VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE**
DATE:	**3.04 PM, THURSDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2021**

MR A. HUTTON: All right. We've got everybody in, so what I'll do is I'll – I'll commence, and we'll go from there. So good afternoon and welcome and thank you for making time this afternoon to meet with the commission. Before I begin, I'd just like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. Welcome to the meeting today for the Culcairn Solar Farm Project SSD 10288. Neoen Australia Proprietary Limited propose to develop a 350-megawatt solar farm with a battery storage facility approximately four kilometres southwest of Culcairn in the Riverina Region of New South Wales.

My name is Andrew Hutton. I'm the chair of this commission's panel, and I'm joined by my fellow commissioner, Professor Zada Lipman. We're also joined by Jane Anderson and Stephen Barry from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interests of openness and transparency and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded and a full transcript will be produced and made available on the commission's website. This meeting is one part of the commission's considerations of which – of this matter and will form one of several sources of information upon which the commission will base its determination.

This is an important part of the process and it's important for commissioners to ask questions of attendees and clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you are asked a question and you're not able to answer that question, then, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which we will also put up onto the commission website. I do request that all members today introduce themselves today before they speak for the first time and for all members to ensure that they do not speak over each other, to ensure accuracy of the transcript. We, once again, thank you very much for the time that you've given us today.

What I'd like to do to kick off is just have a run round the room or the virtual room, and if you could introduce yourself on the applicant team, that will help us not only understand your roles in the project, but also will just help with the transcript. So perhaps, Garth, could I start with you, and then just work through the team. That'd be appreciated.

MR G. HERON: Absolutely. Thank you, Andrew. So Garth Heron here. I'm head of develop for Neoen Australia. I've been head of development for the last five years here.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MS J. MURPHY: Hi, I'm Joanna Murphy. I am the project manager for Neoen for this project.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR M. COOK: Michael Cook. I am one of the asset managers at Neoen and I look after Victoria solar assets.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Lisa, I think you're on mute.

MS L. STIEBEL: Can you hear me?

MR HUTTON: There we go.

MS STIEBEL: Hi. Lisa Stiebel, head of communications .....

MR HUTTON: Lisa, we're just having a couple of issues with your comms. It sort of drops out on us unfortunately. I'm not sure.

MS STIEBEL: I'll try without video.

MR HUTTON: That does appear clearer. Thank you, Lisa. So, sorry, you're head of communications.

MS STIEBEL: Communications and engagement.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Lisa.

MS M. CROKER: And I'm – I'm Michelle Croker. I work as a local engagement person on the – I'm in northeast Victoria. I would with Neoen on Culcairn Solar Farm and a number of other projects. Since August 2019 on Culcairn.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MS N. SMITH: I'm Nicola Smith, and I work for NGH as an environmental consultant and I'm a PM for this project.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Nicola.

MS L. HAMILTON: My name's Lisa Hamilton and I'm one of the accredited assessors that has been involved in the biodiversity assessment for Culcairn Solar Farm.

MR HUTTON: Great, thank you. I appreciate that. That's most helpful. What I do want to just note for the record is that the panel has had an opportunity to visit the site. We visited the site on the 29th of October last year. And we also took the opportunity on the following day, on the 30th, to visit the residents at R24. So we've been onsite and we – we understand the lay of the land. For the record, the site inspection notes are on the commission's website. If you haven't seen those already,

they're up there. We have provided through an agenda. It's really, I guess, an opportunity to sort of lay out some of the issues that we wanted to discuss today.

But before we go there, and perhaps as part of your presentation, you'll address these, in any case. I would be keen for you to go through your presentation to us that has previously been provided. If you're okay, we'd like to ask questions, as we move through that presentation. It's just useful to try and close out those issues as we move through, if you're okay with that.

MR HERON: Yes, of course.

MR HUTTON: Yep. And then we'll likely have a couple of questions at the end that we can sort of talk around as we get to them in the presentation. So what I'll do is I'll hand over to the – your team, Garth, to lead that presentation and we welcome the presentation.

MR HERON: Thank you very much. We were just loading the presentation now.

MR HUTTON: I can – I can confirm I can see PowerPoint going into presentation mode. And - - -

MR HERON: .....

MR HUTTON: - - - good to go from my end. I can see ..... thanks, Garth.

MR HERON: Thank you very much, Andrew, and thank you very much to the commission for speaking with us today. Maybe we go straight into the presentation without any movements. So, yeah, just to introduce Neoen quickly. Neoen, we're a company that was founded in France in 2008 and we've been operating here in Australia since 2012. We're now Australia's largest renewable energy producer and we have 11 operating wind, solar and battery storage projects. As I mentioned in my introduction, my name's Garth Heron. I'm leading the development team here at Neoen, and I've been leading the team for the last five years.

And we've had some very good success over the – over that time. One of the things I'd like to highlight is that we've been twice the development – the developer of choice for two communities that have come to us with projects where farmers have actually asked us to develop wind solar – wind and solar on their land. And we've been pushing very hard on integrating renewable energy with agriculture. So we have sheep grazing on all of our operating solar farms and, on our wind farms, we're doing combinations of sheep grazing, cattle grazing and cropping. So we – we firmly believe that we're able to do renewable energy, larger renewable energy projects alongside agriculture. Thank you.

MS MURPHY: Hello, everyone. It's Joanna Murphy here, the project manager of Neoen. So I wanted to give you a brief overview of the Culcairn Solar Farm. So as you mentioned before, the location of the Culcairn Solar Farm is approximately four

kilometres southwest of Culcairn or 50 kilometres north of Albury. It's located within the Greater Hume Shire LGA and it's located directly beneath the TransGrid's 330kv transmission line, which crosses the proposed development site, which has sufficient capacity to host a project such as Culcairn Solar Farm. It's directly north also of another proposed solar farm, which is the Walla Walla Solar Farm.

This map shows you where the Culcairn Solar Farm is located in relation to the other solar farm projects that are currently being proposed with Walla Walla Solar Farm, of course, being the closest solar farm to Culcairn. This was produced also for the community, because there was a bit of confusion about which solar farm was located where.

MR HUTTON: Joanna, as the crow flies, how far is it from the solar array at Culcairn through to the Walla Walla Solar Farm roughly?

MS MURPHY: About one to two kilometres.

MR HUTTON: Yep. Okay.

MS MURPHY: The reason for choosing this site are many. So we have close proximity, as mentioned, to the TransGrid 330kv transmission line with sufficient capacity. There are also – we're also close to the transport route, which is mainly Olympic Highway. We have a very good solar yield in this particular location. There is minimal vegetation removal required for this project. The visual impact is quite low with the number of non-involved receivers being five within one kilometre of the project. And there's also a low biodiversity impact and low Aboriginal heritage impact. As an overview, so as stated before, the size of the project is 350 megawatts AC solar farm, and that's supported by 100 megawatts ..... from a battery, which also has 200-megawatt hour battery storage capability.

We're expecting approximately 800,000 megawatt hours of solar generation annually, and that is using a single access tracking PV solar panel configuration. There are approximately 900,000 PV modules being installed and – and the image on the right, which you can see the black areas. There will be an onsite substation indicated by the purple area, with the battery co-located next to it and shown in the blue. The project size is approximately 1039 hectares, with the solar print itself 892 hectares. The zoning of the land is rural 1 and it's currently utilised for cropping, with some intermittent grazing. This is showing the proposed project timeline going forward.

So we started the project in 2018, but have submitted the EAS to DPIE back in early 2020, and we're hoping to complete the main studies and grid connection by midyear and have all the other necessary milestones reached to achieve construction commencement early next year. I'll hand over now to Lisa, for the next section.

MS STIEBEL: So the next section provides a summary – sorry – Lisa Stiebel from ..... to summary - - -

MR HUTTON: Sorry, Lisa. I think we're still having those audio issues. I just – I'm not sure what to do, whether – I want to make sure we hear obviously the remarks.

MS STIEBEL: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Perhaps we – we keep trying and if it – if it breaks up again, is there someone else who can assist?

MS STIEBEL: Yes, I think if it breaks up again, perhaps I can pass back to Garth.

MR HUTTON: Sure.

MR HERON: Yep.

MS STIEBEL: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Go ahead.

MS STIEBEL: So the summary of submissions provides ..... the slide provides a summary of a number of submissions ..... which 146 ..... supporting .....

MR HUTTON: Yeah. I'm – is anyone else having the same issue or is it just me?

MS MURPHY: No, same issue.

MR HERON: No .....

MR HUTTON: Sorry, Lisa.

MR HERON: Yeah, same issue.

MR HUTTON: Apologies.

MR HERON: Lisa, I'm happy to take over from here.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Garth.

MS STIEBEL: Okay. Thanks, Garth.

MR HUTTON: ..... thank you.

MR HERON: Okay. Thanks, Andrew. So, yeah, this is a – obviously a slide outlining the summary of the submissions that we've had on the project. And we received 228 submissions and the – featuring 146 objections and 81 supporting submissions. The Greater – sorry – the Greater Hume Shire Council objected to the project due to concerns about loss of agricultural land and amenity impacts by nearby

neighbours, but I – having been in that particular council meeting, it was actually a – a vote that was tied in the meeting. And the mayor who cast the deciding vote, which led them to the objection, did so and explained her actions.

She said she wanted to – she only – she is only voting to object for the purposes of pushing it down this path that we're on right now, to – in order to give everyone their say going forward. But we've also had – we've had – we've also had advice from 11 government agencies on – on – on the actual submission. The table 4, which is a summary of the community submissions, although I think the information in that table were accurate at the time, since the – since the project has actually shrunk in footprint since the initial submission now, I think that the number of submissions now within two kilometres of the site would be much smaller than indicated in that table and just wanted to make a note that there are five non-associated dwellings within one kilometre and 14 between one and two kilometres.

So I'd expect those numbers within, what, two kilometres to be substantially less on the – on the – on the new layout that's been modified.

MR HUTTON: So is that comment, Garth, based on formal communications with those receptors or is that a – that a gut feel?

MR HERON: No, no. It's – it's – it's that – so what we've done - and we'll explain it in subsequent slides - but we've removed the land on the north of the project that was - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR HERON: - - - originally submitted as project land in the – in the submission. And most of our neighbours are to the north of the project, so we've actually increased our buffer to those northern neighbours.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

MR HERON: Here we go. So here's the slide itself. So there was, of course, the – the – the main concern, I guess, on land use. Sorry?

MR HUTTON: No, carry on. It's fine.

MR HERON: Sorry. Yeah, there was – there was a concern on the land use and the project size and the – the – the overall project footprint being too big. In response to those concerns, we looked at our site in – in detail and looked at what – what we could do to minimise the land footprint even further from the original submission. And we've taken the action there of removing the northern land from – from the project. It's had a number of effects removing that northern land, so the biggest one from a community point of view is to increase the buffer between ourselves and our northern neighbours, which is where the majority of the people are.

It has, of course, reduced the efficiency of the solar farm slightly, so we've taken a small hit in terms of our revenue, but we – we believe that the trade-off there is worthwhile in terms of the gain. I guess the one other thing that we've been able to do by removing the northern part of the – of the site is to really reduce the environmental impact. You can see the Billabong Creek along the top of the project and by moving back from the creek and the waterways, this – this actually gives us a chance to further minimise our – our impact and our footprint.

MR HUTTON: I know that in your – to pick up on a comment there, I know that in your response to the Department on the 9th of October there was an amended – or a request to submit amended details. You talk about the production of those panels or removal of those panels from the project, but no – no net loss in – in capacity. I'm just trying to understand that a little bit better, if you could explain that to us.

MR HERON: Yep. So there's – there's two things that have allowed us to do that. The first one is technology. So we've had an increase in the – in the panel output since the original submission, so the panels are getting more powerful and that's allowed us to – to minimise the area. The other one is – is tightening up the – the row spacing. So we – when – when you tighten up the row spacing on a solar farm, you sacrifice some of the generation, particularly in the early mornings and – and evenings, but as I said, I – I think sacrificing some of that revenue in order to minimise the footprint was – was a trade-off that we felt was – was okay.

MR HUTTON: A question that comes to mind then is by tightening up the – the rows, do you make it more difficult for that agri-solar enterprise? In other words, is it going to impact on pasture growth, therefore your grazing – the grazing proposition?

MR HERON: No, we don't think so. I mean, the – the panel sizing is – sorry – the row spacing is already larger than our existing projects. And so we – we would expect that we'd still be able to do the – the sheep grazing that we're doing on all the – our existing projects.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. But based on your – just another question, sorry, on that point. The – the – you've obviously got quite a bit of experience in the – in the grazing and the – and the solar farm enterprise. Can – do – do you expect to get a 20, 25 per cent reduction in productivity from those sheep based on a – a standard grazing scenario? What's your – what's your feeling around productivity interactions with the – with the farm?

MR HERON: Yeah. So I – it's – that's a – that's a good question. So it does actually depend on the kind of year we're having. What we've found on our other projects is there – there is a potential for a slight reduction in productivity and a slight reduction in stocking rates below – beneath the panels compared to a bare field on a – on a typical year where you have a – a nice wet year and everything's growing. But – but in drought, we're – we're actually seeing the ability to stock higher under the solar panels than in – in the – in the fields around the – the solar

farms. And that's because the – the solar panels themselves tend to concentrate the little moisture that there is in the air to drip down the edge of the panel and make some nice green strips of grass that – that the sheep can eat.

And – and one other thing I'll say is there – there are some – apart from stocking rates, there are some other big advantages to grazing sheep on – on solar. And – and one of the really big ones is the survival rate for lambing. So we've seen a – a – a marked improvement in the survival rate of – of lambs on – under – under the solar panels, because they get the – there two benefits of the panels, which help to – help to shield – shield the lambs from – from extreme weather, but you also have the fences around the solar farm, which also help keep out the pests that – you know, the foxes and the like that tend to – tend to kill lambs. So, ultimately, it's been a very successful venture and – and a lot more successful than we expected, I think, when we initially started the sheep trials.

MR HUTTON: Do you know as a – just on a – as a side note, I guess, not specific to this project, but is the industry engaging in any research to try and, I guess, quantify or, you know, the grazing potential and – and provide some data that demonstrates those suggestions?

MR HERON: Yeah, so we've been working with our peak body and there's a group of – of – a group of developers and – and people that are working together now to put together all – all of that information with all of our – all of our experience. And, yeah, look, we're happy to provide some more information there through – through to the panel.

MR HUTTON: Yeah, that'd be – that'd be most helpful, thanks, Garth. We'll take that - - -

MR HERON: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: - - - offer up. Yeah, thank you.

MS STIEBEL: If I'm able to speak and you can hear me, it's Lisa. Just to note that the Clean Energy Council will be releasing their ..... first ..... Australian Agri-Solar Guide in approximately two or three weeks time, so we can share that with you.

MR HUTTON: Yep.

MS STIEBEL: And we're also just about to start undertaking trials on the Numurkah Solar Farm with ..... research partner in Victoria.

MR HUTTON: Right. Thank you. I just had a good idea, Lisa. I don't know whether it's useful, but there is a phone number, I think, that you could possibly ring in to as well, for audio, which might help. If Jane could just post that on the chat page, that might be helpful.

MS STIEBEL: I'll give it a go. Thank you.

MR HUTTON: So we get – get you back in. Yeah. But, thank you, that was clear. Thanks. Okay. I'll let you carry on, please, Garth.

MR HERON: Thanks, Andrew. So it looks like we've already .....

MR HUTTON: .....

MR HERON: Yep, so we can probably skip that. But, yeah, look, the information is there. Tom – Tom Warren has been with us. He's – he's a landowner and a sheep grazier at the Dubbo Solar Farm.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR HERON: And, yeah, look, he – he's also been leading the charge on – on some of this sheep grazing that we do. So, you know, also happy to introduce Tom Warren to – to – to the panel in future, if – if that would help you as well.

MR HUTTON: Yep. And I think that confirms the suggestion of the 20% normal stocking rate, so that's – that's great. Thank you.

MR HERON: Wonderful. All right. So in terms of our response to submissions, we've had a number of – we've had a number of efforts from – from independent consultants to – to quantify the economic impact of – of this project. And what we're looking at here with – with – with the Culcairn Solar Farm is a $640 million infrastructure investment. That's going to result in approximately 350 jobs during construction. But it's not just – it's not just those jobs that we're going to be seeing. We're also going to be see a lot of knock-on benefits for – for all of – all of the other services in the region. And we've seen that consistently across all of the projects that we've done across both New South Wales and the rest of Australia.

We're looking at about seven jobs ongoing full-time when the project is in operation. And, yeah, we've – we've also been developing a local participation plan, which aims to maximise the percentage of local participation that we can have in a project like this. So what we've seen at our other projects, both in New South Wales and across Australia, is that long after these projects are built, there's – there's an enduring benefit for – for the local region and – and for New South Wales indeed. And – and the next slide sort of, you know, outlines that. You know, here you can see the 350 onsite jobs.

PROF LIPMAN: ..... sorry. Could I just interrupt there. That seems a little bit inconsistent with the previous figures ..... reported in the Department's assessment report. We're talking about five to six hundred workers during construction and I think it was 10 in operation. So your figure seems a little bit low. Is that – did you re-evaluate that ..... the initial figures?

MR HERON: Yeah. I – look, we can get back to you on – on that, Professor Zada. I'm not sure where the – where we said the five to six hundred and the 10, but, look, we'll provide some detail around that in a – in a written response.

PROF LIPMAN: Right, thank you.

MR HUTTON: Garth, one of the concerns we heard today from – from council during their stakeholder meeting was the possibility that there'll be a lot of pressure on accommodation in the region, particularly during events that may be occurring in the region. Do – do you have a – a strategy for that or some thoughts around that, given if – if indeed the construction period was to overlap with local events?

MR HERON: Yes, look, we – we do, and we can. I – I think what I would highlight is that there's we – we've got a – we've got a fairly close – we're quite close to Albury in – in – with this project and, you know, I would expect that it – it's not – it's not particularly far for our – for our workers to – to travel in, if they need to, from that – that larger metropolitan area. I – I think – I think working – working with the council around – around specific events that they plan to host, we can certainly do that and we've done that in the past on our projects. You know, we need to – we – we obviously want to create as much economic growth in the region that we – as we can, as we – as we do these projects, but, you know, timing is important and I – and I think – you know, we – we certainly don't want to, you know, outcompete some local events that – that have been maybe going for years. So, you know, take that on notice and – and something that we – we definitely look to – to work with council on.

MS CROKER: Can I just add to that, Garth?

MR HERON: Mmm.

MS CROKER: So we did some work locally, Andrew, in 2020 looking at all of the accommodation options across Albury. We looked at Wagga, Holbrook, all the larger towns in the area, and contacted a lot of accommodation, a lot of hotels and found out what the capacity was across the wider region, how many – and – and I spoke to – I spoke to a lot of the managers of accommodation places about their interest in hosting workers. So we -we kind of have done quite a bit of background work in the area to make sure there is enough capacity for accommodation. But, like Garth said, it will require travel. You know, that – there's very little capacity, as you know, within the towns.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. I – I think – I – I assume that you would expect that some of those construction jobs will come from people that are living in the area. It's not like - - -

MR HERON: Yes.

MR HUTTON: - - - 350 people will be coming in. That's right. That's - - -

MR HERON: Yep.

MR HUTTON: Yep.

MR HERON: Yeah, that – that's absolutely right, Andrew. So we – we seek to use as much as the – of the local workforce as we can. And we – we've – as part of this project and as part of every project we do, we keep a register of all of the local businesses that are interested and are capable of supplying people and – and services to our projects. And they're always our first – our first point of contact with all of our projects. We – you know, if we – if we can – if we can use someone local instead of bringing someone in, that's always a – a big bonus for the project. You know, you see – you see – you see bigger – bigger money going into the local community, but you also – you also, of course, minimise the costs associating with transporting, you know, people in and out and – and mobilising people on the ground.

MR HUTTON: I do also note that the Department has proposed a draft condition, I understand, to prepare an accommodation and employment strategy in consultation with council, so I guess that would be an opportunity for further engagement.

MR HERON: Absolutely. And – and we'd welcome that.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thanks, Garth.

MR HERON: Wonderful. So maybe go on to the social impact. So the concern here really that we saw from – from – from people in the community was a – a question of would – would there be, you know, a big division in community, local division? And – and what we've seen typically with these projects, during – during this phase of the project, when – when the project was being assessed and looked at, the – there usually is some division in the community. You'll have – you'll have people that are very much in favour of projects and people that are a bit more concerned about a project. That's fairly typical. What we have seen though with our projects is that, provided that we have the right kind of benefits going into the community, you tend to see, you know, much better or much less division in the community as the project moves into construction and operations. So we've used our experience in Australia to try to design the community benefit scheme around this project to make sure that we maximise the benefits for the people living closest and – to the project. So mostly the people – the neighbours and the people around Culcairn region. And that includes a number of different things.

So we've got – we've got construction disruption payments which are paid throughout the construction period to neighbours. This is designed not to – not to completely mitigate the impact of construction but just to – just to acknowledge that construction is the most disruptive time for project neighbours, and we understand that, and what we want to do is at least give them something so that they're not out of pocket during construction and, you know – so project neighbours can – they can see things like, you know, increased dust and what we want to make sure is that there's

some money in their pockets. So if they have to take their washing to the local – you know, the local laundromat to do it instead of doing it at their residence and hanging it out, that the moneys available to do that.

Then we go on through to community benefit fund. We're looking at $150,000 annually through our direct community benefit fund. This could include funds for agribusiness as well in the region. And then, of course, we've got the $150,000 annual contribution to the Greater Hume Shire Council for the – under the VPA that we've pledged with this project as well.

MR HUTTON: Garth, and I understand that the community benefit fund will be administered by a third-party group or a – could you talk to that and how that might work?

MR HERON: Yes. So we've – we've – do this on our projects around the country and what we – what we seek to do is set up – set up an independent group that allows – that is looking at, annually, the – their – annually, they will call for submissions from the community onto – as to what the community would like to see and then those submissions will be – will be assessed and they will put forward recommendations for where to spend the fund money. So far this has been very successful for us on our other projects and has led to a number of really great community outcomes. I don't know if – have we got – have we got Lisa back online?

MS CROKER: No. I can – I can talk to this a little bit, Garth. The – so the reason – one of the main reasons for using an independent party to administer the funds is that it allows a lot greater flexibility for the community. So we've been in conversation with the Walla Walla Development Community and the Culcairn Development Committees that are subcommittees of Greater Hume Shire and one of the things that they were really – if we give the money to council, what they will tend to do is administer it in the form of community grants programs. So, you know, several lots of $10,000 or so each year. And what the development committee said to us is they would like access to use that money more strategically. So to develop much bigger projects locally where they can also seek matched funding to achieve much greater things for their community.

We couldn't do that through Greater Hume Shire and I know you're aware that there are other issues as well. But that was one of the main reasons and so those two development committees are really supportive of the model we've come up with and the money will be – the community benefit fund is managed by – there will be a Greater Hume Shire representative on the advisory group. There will also be development committee and other local people. So we know that we're still getting that link to council but much greater flexibility in how the money is distributed in the community.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. I appreciate that explanation. That's great. Thank you.

MR HERON: Thank you very much. Yes. So our community engagement process has been ongoing since 2018 and, indeed, you know, if the project is approved, we will continue – we will continue to engage with the community. Because we're a long-term owner and operator of these assets we know that we have to live with our community engagement. Everything we do has a knock-on effect and if we do a thorough job of this then we're going to have a much better asset at the end of the day. So it did take us quite some time to get our application together for this – for this project and that was deliberate, you know, we've been – we've been working with landowners since 2018 and we've had – we – during 2018 we had our first neighbour meetings as well.

We've done a New South Wales farmers event as well as our own community drop-in sessions. We've had over 130 kitchen table discussions mostly in people's homes and I have personally gone out to visit, you know, probably 20 or 30 of the locals myself to talk about their key concerns, particularly those closest to the project. We've had neighbour meetings, we've attended several meetings with the Greater Hume Shire Council and we've presented to the Greater Hume Shire Council several times.

We've had our main focus really on three groups. So our near neighbours, because of the proximity of the project, are really important during the community consultation and we've spent a lot of time focusing one-on-one with the near neighbours. We've also, obviously, had the consultation with the broader community and the business community and that's really about understanding, you know, what we're going into and who's available to sort of participate in this project and making sure that we get maximum participation.

We've done site visits out to Numurkah Solar Farm. So we've given people in the community a chance, at our cost, to go out and see an operating solar farm for themselves and actually get a real feel for what the project will look like as opposed to just seeing it on paper. And as a result of all of that, you know, we've developed up the community benefit sharing fund and a total sum of $10,000,000 out of the project and we've developed a lot of material, of course, throughout that process and we've been continuously updating the community through that – through that material to try and help and inform the discussion as we go forward and then the response to concern.

So, obviously, there has been some official submissions to this – to the application but we've had a lot of feedback, we have feedback forms at every open day we're in. Anyone can raise a concern at any time on our websites which have been up and operating for a number of years now on this project. And we've been getting back to people. We take the time to follow-up on concerns and we take the time to make sure that people are fully informed on what we're doing. And the other thing I will add is that anything would show, in our – in our open days, when we show it, whether there be maps or information, it's all published on our website as we go. So even if people do miss out on a drop-in session the information is always there for them.

MR HUTTON: Very good. Thank you.

MR HERON: Over to Nicola.

MS SMITH: So visual impact – sorry, Nicola Smith from NGH. The visual impact was the third highest key concern that was raised in the public submissions. But, as Garth has touched on, Neoen have been engaged with the near neighbours since 2018 and, particularly .....

MR HUTTON: Nicola, you're now - - -

MS SMITH: For approval - - -

MR HUTTON: Nicola, you're now having audio issues. We will just drop your camera off and see if that gives you a bit more bandwidth.

MS SMITH: Sure.

MR HUTTON: I think it's all the kids coming home from school.

MS SMITH: Yes. It could also be regional internet.

MR HUTTON: That does sound better. Thank you.

MS SMITH: That sounds better? Fantastic. So, as I was saying, landscape architects took panoramic photographs from the residences within that one-kilometre area to graphically represent what the project infrastructure would look like and the extent of the visual impact. So these montages were used in a visual impact assessment. That was carried out by NGH and it described the potential impact on the visual amenity during operation of the project and our assessment led to the development of a visual mitigation strategy. So it's also noted, as on the first slide, that an agreement was reached with R14 and they were one of the nearest receivers and this residence is now considered an involved receiver. It's also noted that riparian vegetation and native vegetation patches are being retained across the site. So - - -

PROF LIPMAN: Sorry, can I just stop you there for a moment. You mentioned R14, an agreement had been reached by – I seemed to have read somewhere that you were purchasing – purchasing the property; is that correct?

MS SMITH: I will defer to Neoen to answer that question.

MR HERON: So we have – we have made an offer from our nearest neighbour to purchase their property. The actual – the actual offer that we've given them is the ability for them to sell their property to us at an agreed price at their option. So that agreement has been reached and signed with the nearest neighbour to the project. Do you know the file number to that one?

PROF LIPMAN: R14.

MR HERON: That's R14. R14.

PROF LIPMAN: Right. Right. And that – that has all been finalised at this stage?

MR HERON: That has been – that has been finalised and signed and agreed. Correct.

PROF LIPMAN: If – if – may I just ask you what your intentions would be with that particular site or haven't you thought that far ahead? Would you be expanding – thinking of expanding the solar farm in that area or doing something - - -

MR HERON: No.

PROF LIPMAN: No?

MR HERON: No. So we wouldn't expand the solar farm. If we – if they were to sell their residence to us there's potential that we may use it as accommodation for our own people as they – as they're working on the project and after that we would have to assess what we do following that. Whether that stays at accommodation for the people looking after the project or whether we do something else with it at that time.

PROF LIPMAN: Right. Thank you.

MS SMITH: So the visual mitigation strategy and ongoing consultation has resulted in, as Garth has mentioned before, the removal of all project infrastructure from the area north of Cummings Road and this has resulted in the reduction of 14 receivers to five receivers within that one kilometre radius from the site. A landscape plan was also developed and that was with Spiire Landscape Architects for the receivers who were deemed to be impacted by project infrastructure which includes the near neighbours of R24 and R33, which, just to note, is a dilapidated and vacant house to the south of the site.

R09 was deemed to have a low visual impact. However, Neoen have agreed to plant a five-metre wide vegetation screen along the project boundary and that's to further screen broken visual impacts from that residence. Visual impacts at R17 and R19, within this one kilometre radius, were identified as having a low inherent visual impact and that's because of the low topography of the site and also the riparian vegetation of Back Creek and that – which is located between these residences and the project infrastructure. Any visual impact will be further reduced by supplementary plantings that Neoen has agreed to within the Back Creek/riparian corridor which also has biodiversity benefits as well.

So planting vegetation will be screened along sensitive parts of the site boundary which includes long roads to reduce the views from road users and non-reflected

materials and paints will be used to reduce the glint and glare and also minimise unnecessary night-time lighting of the development to reduce any night light impacts on neighbouring properties. So if I can just go back to the slide response to R24. So R24 – just the slide before – you can see in that top image the house is located to the western – the western side of the development site. The mitigation for these potential impacts – so an additional 60 metre setback from this residence has resulted in a separation distance of 520 metres and that's including an additional five metres of vegetation screening which would result in a 20 metre wide screen and that's to augment existing scattered vegetation between the residence and the project infrastructure.

The distance to the project infrastructure to the south, because they also are impacted by views to the south of the residence, is now 1.2 kilometres and that's with a vegetation screen of 15-metre wide screen between the residence and the infrastructure. So, on slide 19, you can see – or if we can go back quickly, just to go through those photos, this is the photo montage of the extent of - - -

PROF LIPMAN: Sorry, can I ask you again: the distance from the residence for R34 to the footprint is currently what?

MS SMITH: At the moment, 520. So the distance is from the sheds where the R24 point is ..... from their sheds and to the footprint is 520 metres.

PROF LIPMAN: .....

MS SMITH: From the residence it's – pardon?

PROF LIPMAN: Sorry. Carry on.

MS SMITH: From the residence itself it's 550 metres between the homestead and the footprint of the solar infrastructure.

PROF LIPMAN: I see. Because from your amendment – most recent amendment, and in the ..... it came out at sort of 498 to 500. So you've actually increased it since that time?

MS SMITH: Yes. And I think that discrepancy came from where the actual point of R24 is – has been placed near there – near the agricultural sheds, not necessarily the residence itself.

PROF LIPMAN: Okay. Thank you for clarifying.

MS SMITH: So in that second image on this slide: this is a – the photo montage with the artist's impression of the solar panel's view to the east of the residence. The second photo are the extent of the infrastructure impact, it's highlighted in red, and then the last image on this slide is from the landscape plan by the landscape architects and that includes the 20 metre vegetative screen which has been

augmented with existing vegetation. So it's quite hard to see without zooming right in but that's what the impact would be quite low with that additional vegetation planted.

If we move to the next slide: is R33. And this is currently the derelict vacant residence. It faces the southern boundary of the project site and it's also the closest receiver to the project boundary. So you can see in that first image that the views are quite prominent. As a result of ongoing consultation to address the visual impact, a further setback of project infrastructure has been increased by a further 120 metres. So that's providing a separation distance to the infrastructure from the residence of 250 metres and vegetation screening, which has been proposed to mitigate these impacts, will be of a width of 20 metres, which you can see on that last image of this slide what the effect of that vegetative screen would be on the solar farm infrastructure from that residence.

MR HUTTON: Can you comment on the maintenance of plantings? We've seen in previous panels photographs provided where screens were planted but trees have died and there has been – apparently been no evidence of, you know, replacing that. What's your commitment to ensuring that the screens, give they're a key mitigation, again, to get – grow – grow well and grow in a timely manner?

MR HERON: Yes. This is an interesting one, Andrew. Maybe I can just start with it. So, I mean, as a long-term owner and operator of these projects, we have to live with the result of our construction. So we don't sell the project on which means that, you know, sooner or later if things fall over on our projects, we're going to have to – we're going to have make good. So I will make that point first.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR HERON: But the other part of it is that often we get – we get given a directive to plant mature trees whether – that are already established. Now, the problem that you have with mature trees is that the survival rate can be quite low. So although you get initially more screening by planting the bigger trees and the more mature trees, you do have a much lower survival rate. And so you do actually need to then often go in and replant and revegetate. We've had a lot more success with planting younger trees. Although the initial visual impact is higher they grow faster and they do a better screen. So, you know, if there's one thing I can encourage, and certainly based on our experience, is that if you allow us to plant, you know, seedlings and smaller trees, we have a better survival rate and we end up with a better screen faster.

But even with the mature trees, I mean, there's an obligation for us to continue to maintain these trees and we take that pretty seriously and we will get called out for it if, on our sites, we haven't done it.

MR HUTTON: On your projects have you ever considered – given you've been around this project since 2018, have you ever considered putting in strategic plantings in 2018 so that when and if an approval comes you've got three, four, five

year old trees that are actually legitimately providing screens? Because concerns we hear regularly is that, yes, the landscaping will go in but the benefit during construction is limited due to tree growth. Do you have a comment around that as a - - -

MR HERON: Yes. Look, I mean, it's a great idea. We haven't done it to date. I think – I think you also have to – I mean, when we go into a site from the beginning, we – it takes us a while to learn where the sensitive receivers are likely to be and also, you know, get some feedback from the community and from those – from those residents as to what they want to see. Yes. So, I mean, it will probably be difficult to do it from day 1 but I take your point that it might be something that you can do partway along the development process. So far we haven't done it. It would add a little bit of complication. You would probably end up planting some trees that didn't matter or weren't quite right.

Maybe the biodiversity impact is something that we need to consider as well. We obviously have to design these screens so that they are the right type of tree and doing the right thing within that environment and that would also be something that would come into it. But, yes, I don't know if the ecologists - - -

MR HUTTON: Well, you know, you do enough of this to know what screens look like - - -

MR HERON: Yes.

MR HUTTON: - - - and I don't think anybody would object to someone planting trees. But, anyway, it's just an interesting question that I haven't asked before that I thought, given the opportunity, I know it's not relevant to this particular project, but given you've developed a number of projects, I was just keen to investigate that as an option.

MR HERON: Yes. Look, it's a good idea and I would like to sort of look into it but we haven't done it today.

MR HUTTON: Sure. Apologies. We will carry on with the slides. Thanks.

PROF LIPMAN: Can I just make a comment here that the figure of 498 is also in this one. Does this ..... R24 to the – on the final proposed product. So that isn't – in fact, that's the shed, you say?

MS HAMILTON: Sorry, what figure are you referring to?

PROF LIPMAN: I was looking at the slide in the distance from R24. It does, in fact, say 498, as I mentioned earlier, not the figure you said. Is this – does this - - -

MS HAMILTON: From the shed? Yes.

MR HUTTON: If you wouldn't mind just, perhaps, taking on notice, providing the panel with a – just a quick aerial – just to show us the difference between the 500 and ..... the 498? That would be appreciated to clarify that, please.

MS HAMILTON: Sure.

PROF LIPMAN: And if we could perhaps get it in writing that that 498 is - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: - - - in fact - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: - - - the distance - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: - - - between the shed.

MS HAMILTON: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Thank you.

PROF LIPMAN: Yes.

MS HAMILTON: All right. I will - - -

PROF LIPMAN: Now, before we go on - - -

MS HAMILTON: - - - take on from - - -

PROF LIPMAN: - - - can I just ask you something on biodiversity generally? I'm looking at this – the number of trees and things which - - -

MS HAMILTON: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: - - - are already in the assessment report. One of the things I noticed is that you're widening Weeamera Road to seven metres and, of course, that's going to involve caring of vegetation, and the vegetation in that region is classified as high quality native vegetation, and I'm wondering whether that has been factored into the figures that you've given and whether it's reflected in the offsets that you're offering.

MS HAMILTON: Yes. That's definitely something that has been a key focus of our assessment is looking at the quality and condition of areas of native vegetation that are being impacted.

PROF LIPMAN: What about the road? That particular road?

MS HAMILTON: Yes. The road itself, it is quite – it is vegetated. There is actually a fairly exotic component along that road just because it is – has weed encroachment from the agricultural areas. There are some sections along there which we've mapped as a little bit higher quality and that is actually reflected in the offset costs - - -

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MS HAMILTON: - - - once we enter that into the calculator absolutely.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MS HAMILTON: So we do plots in accordance with the biodiversity assessment methodology and the way that works is that we do a transact and we count every single individual native plant and forb that's in there and do the cover and abundance and then it's entered into the calculator and produced .....

PROF LIPMAN: All right. I understand. Is that ..... figures you've already given or is that something still to come in?

MS HAMILTON: The figures on this – do you mean the figures on this slide?

PROF LIPMAN: That you've given so far in the assessment report.

MS HAMILTON: Yes. Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: Okay.

MS HAMILTON: Yes. Yes, that's right. It's definitely all detailed in the – in the biodiversity development assessment report. Yes. So we will just start – so I'm Lisa and I'm an accredited assessor that has worked on Culcairn over its period. I – so one of the – one of the concerns raised was biodiversity and, I guess, throughout the various stages of the assessment of this proposal, we've actually been able to reduce impacts to biodiversity and this is primarily been through changes to design and ..... in footprint and also increased mitigation. Specifically, the removal of infrastructure north of Cummings Road has reduced direct impacts to biodiversity. So by removing that area we've been able to also avoid clearing an additional 13 paddock trees.

But overall the proposal has been able to avoid most of the patches of native vegetation which includes the woodland and native grasses. So there's 51 hectares of native vegetation patches within the development site and only 0.33 hectares ..... proposed to be removed, which is less than one per cent of the site. These areas were a small area of derived grassland within the site that would need to be – an access

track would need to be constructed and then, as you have already raised, would also be the road upgrade along Weeamera Road between the quarry and the access site.

So, in addition to the patches of vegetation within the site, there are also scattered paddock trees. So from the commencement of the project we've been able to reduce the clearing of these paddock trees from 99 down to 64, which is what it is currently standing at. These trees are isolated and scattered across the site in low density but, given the extent of the site, avoidance of all these trees hasn't been possible. Many of these trees are experiencing dieback and are in poor condition but it has been a key focus to try and retain as many of these as possible.

So, in addition to this, we've been able to avoid clearing paddock trees within the panel layout as well which was a change from the initial assessment. So I guess a common feature of these large mature trees in this landscape is the presence of hollows. Many of these trees contain hollows which is habitat for threatened species and also common fauna species. So the overall reduction in paddock trees to be cleared we've also been able to reduce the removal of 22 hollow bearing trees from the initial assessment. I guess one of the key focuses of the management plan stage will be implementing both a biodiversity management plan and a rehabilitation plan for the – so these areas – this is specifically going to be looking at enhancing the areas of vegetation that we're actually retaining onsite. So it will be a net positive – well, a one positive in addition to offsets for that component.

PROF LIPMAN: Are you focusing on a ..... and the process for doing that?

MS HAMILTON: The connectivity - - -

PROF LIPMAN: Yes. Connectivity.

MS HAMILTON: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. That has definitely been – definitely been assessed as part of our impact assessment. So we do understand that paddock trees can be used as stepping stones in landscapes and one of the things that we have implemented is that we're doing some supplementary planting across the sites which is in addition to the landscape planting and offsets that will hope to increase connectivity through that landscape just with the loss of those – some of those scattered paddock trees.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

MS HAMILTON: I will just quickly talk about one of the issues – one of the concerns that was raised which was Hairy Panic. So Hairy Panic – or it's sometimes also called Witchgrass – refers to a number of grasses in the genus Panicum. Some of the weed varieties are actually very common in our local area where we are here and they are actually often mistaken for a native species. But the weed species that I think the community is actually concerned about if an annual grass which is native to North America and its seed head is dispersed by wind and can actually be quite a big

nuisance and builds up on fence lines and it can build up on houses and just annoys everyone, I think.

So interestingly, panicum grasses aren't actually listed as a priority weed under the Biosecurity Act. However, a general biosecurity duty applies to all plants in New South Wales. So any landholder has a responsibility to prevent, eliminate or minimise any biosecurity risks that plants may ..... so Neoen has proposed a number of avoidance mitigation measures to reduce biosecurity impacts. These include implementing standard hygiene control measures during construction. There will also be ongoing weed control during the operation and grazing beneath the panels which would also assist with weed control which would be a positive. And in particular the control of Hairy Panic would be a benefit to the operation of the solar farm by reducing potential build-up of ..... over the panels and also protects the welfare of livestock grazing beneath the panels because panicum species are known to cause photosensitivity and liver issues in sheep. So really there's a benefit for controlling Hairy Panic as part of that operation anyway.

MR HERON: Yes. And this is – maybe I will just add a few comments on this – Garth. So this is something that we – features actually in the sheep grazing that we've done and the sheep grazing trials we've done. One of the ways of helping control this is to make sure that the sheep are actually – we put them in sections of solar farms so that they eat everything right down to the ground in each of the sections rather than just nibbling at the stuff they like to eat and leaving the rest. And we've found that to be very effective in controlling weeds.

MS HAMILTON: Very good.

MR HUTTON: Thank you Lisa.

MS HAMILTON: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: So this is probably back to me unless Lisa – unless Lisa's .....

MS HAMILTON: Yes. Nicola, are you on this one?

MS SMITH: I am. So Nicola Smith, NGH again. So slide 23 shows a map, as Joanna had pointed out before, of the four solar farm projects within the greater Hume shire and you can see Culcairn there at the top and that it's approximately 1.2 kilometres north of the proposed Walla Solar Farm from its closest point. So key cumulative impacts include visual impact particularly on R17 where visual impacts could result from ..... land. So regarding the visual impact, R17 would be located approximately 800 metres from the development footprint of both projects. However, due to the distance, existing vegetation and the low topography of the area, views from R17 to both projects would be limited and both projects would be relatively low-lying with the panel height up to 4.2 metres. So Neoen has committed to further mitigate - - -

MR HUTTON: .....

MS SMITH: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Would you be able to – I'm sure it's in the documentation but it would be helpful if you have a photo montage from R17.

MS SMITH: Yes, I can provide those.

MR HUTTON: ..... something you could forward to us in your response, that would be useful please.

MS SMITH: Definitely.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MS SMITH: Yes.

MR HUTTON: Or direct us – if it's easier, direct us to the appropriate section of the current documentation but - - -

MS SMITH: No I can definitely provide those. That's fine.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Just occurred to me that that would be useful. Yes. Thank you.

MS SMITH: Yes. So Neoen has committed to further mitigate visual impacts to R17 by supplementing the riparian vegetation along Back Creek with 20-metre deep planting to supplement that vegetation. So also increasing habitat connectivity and mitigating the loss of paddock trees across the site. Regarding the loss of agricultural land, the development footprint of the project and other operational approved and proposed state significant development solar farms in the Riverina/Murray region will be approximately 8000 hectares. The loss of 8000 hectares of agricultural land represents a very small fraction so 0.09 per cent of the 9.1 million hectares of land being used for agricultural output in the Riverina/Murray region. So this would result in a negligible reduction in the overall productivity – regional productivity.

So ..... all four proposed SSD solar projects within the ..... if they all proceed they would have a combined development footprint of approximately 2000 hectares which is approximately 0.59 per cent of the 335,000 hectares of land being used for agriculture within the greater Hume LGA. And just noting that sheep grazing can still occur under the solar panels during the operation of the project. And with – as with all other solar projects, the land will be returned to its existing level of agricultural capability following decommissioning.

And I just wanted to note that the land was also – some of the reasons pertaining to land use and to the soil – or agricultural capability in particular, for reason for this

site is that the land and soil capability mapping for this area is all class 4. Class 4 means it has moderate to severe limitations for cultivation. It's also – there is no mapped biophysical strategic agricultural land. And a soil survey that was done by McMahon Earth Science for the whole site at the time, which included the northern portion of the site, found chromosols – or the soil were chromosols and that the top soil had a low ..... exchange capacity which means the top soil is relatively low in nutrients. So that's just supporting the fact that it's mapped as class 4 land and also that there is no ..... land mapped for this site.

MR HUTTON: Excellent. Couple – I note we're running over time. We did start probably 10 minutes late so I'm just watching the clock. Just on the cumulative impact, if you don't mind, just two quick questions. One in relation to traffic and the scenario that Walla, the Quarry and Culcairn could all be using the same road routes under a scenario where construction was being done concurrently. And secondly, just in relation to construction noise for R17 which, as you're aware, both myself and Zada were commissioners on the Walla – I think that was R2 on Walla Walla – but we understood that there could have been some cumulative noise impacts during construction should both farms be constructed at the same time. Are you able to make comment about that?

MR HERON: I'm having a talk on the cumulative noise. I think we could coordinate that. So when we work across a site like this, the noise impacts happen mostly when we're putting in the piles in proximity to houses. And obviously there's distance setbacks that help to attenuate the noise coming from it. But I will say that the period of time spent doing that close to houses will be very limited even though, you know, we're talking about, you know, maybe a one or two-year construction period. The time that we're in that section of the site doing those activities is limited to a number of weeks. So I think we could coordinate that to make sure that, you know, there weren't cumulative impacts and we weren't doing the same activities at the same time.

MR HUTTON: Yes.

MR HERON: Or indeed, if it was preferable to the landowner, you know, try to do those impacts at the same time and get them over and done with. I think again it comes down to ongoing communication with the landholders and their neighbours as we go into construction.

MR HUTTON: Yes. And to the traffic point?

MR HERON: I think traffic is kind of similar as well. We will have periods of time during construction where traffic is quite high and other times where it's fairly low. And it's the same kind of thing, I think. I think we can work with council; we can work with the other developers to make sure that we're not trying to do the same thing at the same time and having double impacts.

MR HUTTON: Okay. All right. So just watching the clock, if you could just talk to the last slide and then I've just got a couple of residual questions and we will see where we land timewise.

MR HERON: Okay. So I'm happy to – yes – quickly talk about fire risk and mitigation. So obviously fire risk is something that we think about across all of our projects. And, you know, grass fires are a real thing in relation to any project that's out in rural areas. What we do on all of our projects is develop up obviously the bush fire management plan. And we've done that in consultation with our local RFS. All of that would be implemented during construction operation and during decommissioning. Ironically probably one of the most – things – the highest risk of fire often comes from fire mitigation measures. So when we're – particularly when we're mowing grass around the site. That's probably the most dangerous time for us, you know, potentially starting a fire.

We have some experience obviously with this so wherever we're mowing during hot summer months and we know it's dry, we will always, you know, do things like having a water tank being towed around and behind the mower as it goes forward. I guess this is – none of this is new to us. We don't see that there's really a lot of increased fire risk from the actual electrical equipment itself although there's always the potential because it's electrical. But, you know, it's obviously up to us during – to continue to follow the plan and update it in consultation with the local RFS and make sure that everything is in place as we go.

We've also had a – recently a fire management workshop at Numurkah Solar Farm on the 18th of March of 2020. We had representatives here from our – the site operations team, Fire & Rescue New South Wales, Culcairn Fire Station and the CFA. Greater Hume shire were invited as well, and we had the Volunteer and Culcairn Rural Fire Service. So we took them through – there we took them through what we had been doing at Numurkah and what we've doing at our other sites around Australia that are in operation and heard their concerns. And that of course fed into our management and emergency response plan that we've developed as a result.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Could of quick questions then just from my side. I understand part of the access along the – would be the western side – is a ..... Crown Road or Crown land. And if I'm correct, the mitigation was around – was acquisition of that.

MR HERON: Mmm.

MR HUTTON: Can you update the panel of where you are with that purchase.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I will have to take that one on notice. As far as I understand it has not yet been purchased and it was with council to make a decision.

MR HUTTON: Okay. If you wouldn't mind just giving us a response, that would be great. The second of three issues just – the heat island effect is one that we've

seen comments from submissions on this particular development and the responses typically refers back to, I think, a Shepparton project which I understand to be quite a bit smaller than what we're proposing here. I could be wrong. Are you able to provide any comments from your experience around the heat island effect and the likelihood of that being an issue and if so, how you might mitigate that.

MR HERON: Yes. So we've heard the heat island effect on – you know, it has come up on a lot of our projects as they've moved through the approval phase. I can say, without any exception, we've never had any complaints of heat island effect on any of our operating projects And the heat island effect is a very localised effect where the panels can potentially, as the land is cooling down, the panels can actually retain some heat and cause a localised heat, I guess, above the panels. In the literature that we have reviewed, the heat island effect has been really restricted to being measurable really only very, very close to the panels. And what we've seen in the literature is once you get out to, sort of, 15 metres or 20 metres there is no measurable effect. There's actually no effect whatsoever in terms of the difference between panels and no panels.

So what we do around our projects is obviously put a buffer on the edge of our projects to make sure that we've got adequate space between our panels and the surrounding neighbours. And on this particular project we've got a minimum 30 metre buffer. So we're well beyond a shadow of a doubt of having any heat island effect on any project neighbours.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you. My last question then talks to decommissioning and a question – or a comment that has been made to the panel in relation to, I guess, funding of decommissioning. And the point relevant in the sense that the consent goes with the land therefore the decommissioning responsibility for the solar farm could lie with the property owner if your company was to disappear, or do something else or whatever, or is technology is moving so fast that in 10 years we aren't generating solar energy. I'm again, you know, just hypothesising. Do you have in place structures to guarantee that there are sufficient funds available to decommission the site if and when you reach that point? Could you comment on that.

MR HERON: Yes. So we do and – so what we look at when we do our financial model is making sure that we do have sufficient funds at the end of the project in order to decommission the project. Obviously, this project is part of also a much larger portfolio for us so, you know, this won't be our last project nor will it be – nor is it our first. So yes, we have decommissioning plans for all of our projects. We do make sure that there are funds available for decommissioning. But one other point I will also make is that the grid connection points of these projects are actually very valuable. And we spend quite a large amount of money as part of each of these projects to land connections to the network and study connections to the network as part of these projects.

And the substations that we build for these projects have a 50-year life as opposed to the projects which usually typically have a 30 year life. So there is significant residual value in projects even once they cease to generate with the first equipment that's brought out on site. And obviously to get approvals to keep a site going or to be able to keep a site going or rejuvenate it, you would have to deal with the decommissioning as part of that. So yes – so we look – we've looked into it in all our projects. We do take it into account. We make sure that there are sufficient funds available. And, yes, there is also residual value in a project like this. So even if it was to fall into someone else's hands at some stage, you know, Neoen goes to the wall or something happens, there is significant residual value in a project would mean that the rehabilitation would be necessary and something an asset owner would do.

MR HUTTON: Zada, I'm sorry I'm hogging the questioning. Do you have any questions at all?

PROF LIPMAN: Yes. I would really like to – want to ask – I noticed at one stage in ..... I think you said that you were committed to removing the overgrown infrastructure and coping up to a specific depth. But DPI Agriculture was concerned because they said that when you're cutting for cropping you often go deep into the ground. And then I noticed a later commitment on your behalf to actually remove all underground - - -

MR HERON: Everything.

PROF LIPMAN: - - - cabling. Does that still stand?

MR HERON: Yes, that stands. So we – yes, we made – we were happy to accept to remove all cabling from the ground.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you. That's .....

MR HUTTON: Any further questions, Zada?

PROF LIPMAN: No – I suppose my concern was a bit about the water usage as well. During construction you mentioned that you would be using 62 million litres, which is larger than generally expected, and that you have an agreement with the council in relation to standpipe or the Quarry. How far has that progressed?

MR HERON: Yes. So I think we have an agreement to take the water from the standpipe on the project but I will also provide some further detail on that as a follow up. One thing I would also like to note is the amount of water that we use during construction will depend on what the weather is like and what the climate is like during construction. Most of the water is used for dust suppression on roads. And so if we're having a particularly dry year we're likely to use a lot more water than if we have a wet year. So it does – to an extent it does depend on what happens during

construction. But we have committed to bringing water on site at our own expense and not taking water out of the local water table.
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PROF LIPMAN: Thanks very much. Just to get back to that point that Andrew made about Shoals Road, the ..... Road and the purchase of the Crown land, could you also perhaps provide us with some information on the progress on that please.

MR HERON: Yes.

PROF LIPMAN: Thanks.

MR HERON: Yes, we will do.

MR HUTTON: Okay. We’re a little bit over time and I apologise for that but thank you for your presentation. I think – unless there’s any other comments you would like to make as the applicant, we might close the meeting. Just check, any further comments you would like to make?

MR HERON: No. Thank you – thank you again for letting us talk today and for your time. And yes, we look forward to the public meeting next week. Is there anything in particular you would like us to focus on that’s maybe different from what we’ve presented today in the public meeting?

MR HUTTON: It’s really up to you to present what you would like. So we don’t have any real focus – or real expectation so I think I will leave it with you. Maybe if you wanted to have a conversation with Jane about some of the previous submissions made by applicants as a guide, maybe she can direct you some of those on the web page etcetera. That might be a useful reference point. But, certainly, it’s up to you to go through the project as you see fit.

MS J. ANDERSON: I’m happy to have a chat with you over the next day or two and talk you through any questions that you might have about the public meeting.

MR HUTTON: Yes.....

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Great. Thank you.

MR HERON: Thank you. And beyond the public meeting, you know, we’re always trying to improve how we develop projects and I think there was a good suggestion in terms of planting trees early may – but if there’s anything else that the panel, you know, would like to talk to us about in regards to our future developments, that’s something I’m extremely interested in. So, you know, we’re always trying to improve what we do. No project is perfect, and we learn as we go. But if there’s anything that you’ve seen as well, happening at other projects that you would like to see happening on our projects then I would love to her about it.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you very much.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation.

MR HUTTON: All right. Well, thank you. What I will do then is close the meeting. Thank you again for your time and I will now push the – call the meeting closed. Thank you.

PROF LIPMAN: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Thank you.

MS HAMILTON: Thank you.

MS SMITH: Thank you.

MR HERON: Thank you.

MS ANDERSON: Thank you.

RECORDING CONCLUDED **[4.27 pm]**