New South Wales Government
Independent Planning Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: WALLAROO SOLAR FARM (SSD-9261283)

APPLICANT MEETING

PANEL:	MR ANDREW MILLS DR BRONWYN EVANS AM MR RICHARD PEARSON
OFFICE OF THE IPC:	TAHLIA HUTCHINSON
APPLICANT REPRESENTATIVES:	BEN CRANSTON LES SEDDON KYLE MERCER
LOCATION:	Zoom Videoconference
DATE:	4:00PM – 5:00PM WEDNESDAY, 10th JULY 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

ANDREW MILLS: Good afternoon and welcome. I'd just like to start with an opening statement, and I notice that – thank you – you've sent through a presentation you'd like to go through, and we'll turn to that. But to start with, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from Gadigal land, and I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all of the countries from which we virtually meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Wallaroo Solar Farm case, SSD-9261283, currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, Wallaroo Solar Farm Pty Limited, is seeking approval to develop a 100 megawatt solar farm with a battery energy storage system and associated infrastructure.

My name is Andrew Mills, and I am the Chair of the Commission as well as of this panel. And I'm joined by my fellow Commissioners, Dr Bronwyn Evans and Mr Richard Pearson.

DR BRONWYN EVANS: Hello.

RICHARD PEARSON: Hello.

ANDREW MILLS: We're also joined by Tahlia Hutchinson from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interest of openness and transparency and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded, and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website.

This meeting is one part of the Commission's consideration of this matter, and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its determination. It's important for Commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it's considered appropriate. If you are asked a question and are not in a position to answer, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which will then put up on our website.

I request that all members here today introduce themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure that they do not speak over the top of each other, to ensure accuracy in the transcript.

So we'll now begin. Thank you very much. Thank you for the presentation you've sent through. Would you like to present it? Or would you like us to present it? I presume it might be easier from your end, so that you keep control of the slides.

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, that's fine, I can present it, if that works for everybody. Not a problem at all.

ANDREW MILLS: That's great, thank you, Ben.

BEN CRANSTON: Brilliant. Well, yes, thank you for taking the time today. I'm Ben, I'm the Project Manager for Wallaroo Solar Farm. I've been working on the development since 2022, came in about halfway through. But yeah, thank you, and look forward to showing the presentation. Les, did you want to –?

LES SEDDON: Yes, I'll introduce myself now. So my name is Les Seddon. I'm the Principal Consultant, Environmental Assessment and Approvals at NGH. So we've been engaged to help Wallaroo Solar Farm prepare the EIS. So I've been leading that preparation for the EIS since 2021, so I came on board with NGH. I've got my colleague here, Kyle Mercer, who's been helping with the EIS as well. I'll let you go for it, Ben.

BEN CRANSTON: Brilliant. Thank you. So I'll start off with the first slide, obviously. So the project's located in Wallaroo, down on the ACT border in Yass.

ANDREW MILLS: Ben, are you sharing?

BEN CRANSTON: Oh, sorry, sorry, I've had it on my screen. Sorry.

ANDREW MILLS: It just helps us as we go through.

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, apologies.

ANDREW MILLS: Sorry, I should have added, do you mind if we ask questions along the way, just interrupt you?

BEN CRANSTON: No, that's fine, not a problem at all.

ANDREW MILLS: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: Can everybody see that now?

ANDREW MILLS: Yes.

RICHARD PEARSON: Yes.

BRONWYN EVANS: Yes, thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: Brilliant. Thank you. So, yeah, sorry, I'll start again. The project's located in Wallaroo, down the ACT border. It's a 100 megawatt project with a 90 megawatt hour battery. The project's made up from two different landowners, where we'll have a lease over the land. The total land area is 393 hectares. And the project footprint's 165.

There's onsite transmission lines that we'll be connecting directly into, and the project started, we received the SEARs in 2020, and it's taken a while to move this

far, but here we are.

Again, This is just a project overview, sorry. Alignment with policy. The project aligns with the Commonwealth Renewable Energy Target, the New South Wales Climate Change Policy Framework, and the New South Wales Net Zero Plan. The effective and compatible use of land, the New South Wales Large Scale Solar Energy Guidelines, the project sort of conforms to that with a good, solar reach source and available connection capacity, minimal environmental impacts. We avoid LSC lands of 1 to 3, the land soil capability, and it has available connection capacity right next to the Canberra substation.

Sorry, the South East Tablelands Regional Plan, where it's assisting in positioning the region as a hub in renewable energy excellence. And the Yass Valley Settlement Strategy that was put on the agenda, we're maintaining the agricultural use of the land, maintaining the rural landscape character, and limiting the potential for residential creep into that border area.

So one of the issues that's been raised a bit has been the loss of agricultural land. The project has no BSAL present, BSAL mapped land within the footprint. LSC 4 across the footprint. We're going to continue running sheep, grazing sheep throughout the project area. It's going to be, the excess land outside of the footprint is going to continue raising sheep. And existing farming infrastructure outside of the footprint will remain, and be untouched by us.

As part of the agreement with the landowners, we will be moving the cattle yards, the sheep yards, outside of the project footprint, and installing new sheep yards for them to be used as part of the project. Watering infrastructure will also be built throughout the – within the footprint, so the sheep will have access to water.

ANDREW MILLS: Ben, can I just stop you there? The access to and from whatever is the new sheep yards and so on, is that just through gates and so on? Is that the plan?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, yes, it will be.

ANDREW MILLS: OK, so it's just a bit of herding that's required, effectively?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes.

ANDREW MILLS: Transport, putting them on trucks and moving them?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, exactly right. And so approximately 50% of the land is outside of the project footprint, so that will continue to run as the operational farm, as well as inside. But most of the operational works, there will only be grazing on the inside of the project footprint. Most of the farming operation works will happen outside of the project footprint.

RICHARD PEARSON: I was just going to ask a follow up question Ben. Are the

landowners having to kind of reduce their stocking numbers as a result of this, or can they run pretty much the same amount of stock around solar panels, or more intensively use other land? How does that work for them? Because clearly they want to keep sheep grazing.

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, yeah, exactly. The big change will be one of the landowners currently runs cattle. But they weren't working well with the solar farm, so they're going to be switching to sheep within the footprint. And the other one, we're expecting to have the same capacity.

RICHARD PEARSON: OK, so there's some change to the agricultural productivity, but the landowners are obviously on board with what's proposed?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes. Yes, definitely.

LES SEDDON: Sorry, is it all right to jump in here with a bit more information?

BEN CRANSTON: Yep.

LES SEDDON: Just further to what Ben's saying, the landowner to the south, so he currently doesn't do a lot of agricultural production on the property himself. He just sent out to different other producers. So those guys will be changing their use of the site. It's not the actual landowner himself that runs any livestock on the site, but he's agistee, he's happy to make the change.

At the moment, it's only opportunistic agistment on that site with some cattle every now and then, as well as some horse grazing for local, nearby neighbours from Canberra and things like that as well. But that will be continued to be maintained on the other parts of the property as well, and basically, under the transmission lines that take up a fair bit of those properties as well, they'll continue to do the horse agistment for the local pony clubbers and the likes as well.

ANDREW MILLS: So Les, the people who currently agist the land with cattle, are they situated contiguous to the current properties, or are they trucking them in from other places?

LES SEDDON: It's my understanding – Ben, correct me if I'm wrong – but they just truck them in opportunistically, when they need adjustment and to move them on from elsewhere.

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, that's correct.

ANDREW MILLS: Thank you.

RICHARD PEARSON: Sorry. Actually, no, that does beg the question as to presumably they're going to have to change to move their unloading point to the new yards. But that's the only difference?

LES SEDDON: Yeah. So there's just two properties there. The existing yards for the northern property are within the project footprint, and they'll just be moved to outside, and have a shared gateway that they just go straight through into the property, so that we're not using up the space for the viable solar production with those yards. And then down to the site they have existing yards as well that will be in the same situation. They'll either use other yards, on the remaining property, or Ben will likely supply them with new facilities that are more conducive to the sheep.

RICHARD PEARSON: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: So the next slide I have is – sorry? Yeah, the next slide I have for the visual, so during the EIS process, we did a visual impact assessment. The visual impact showed that the impacts on amenity and landscape were low. Most viewpoints that were selected from the surrounding receivers came back as low and very low, with one which came back as moderate, but with mitigation that comes down to low as well.

The site topography, the density of the urban area over in the ACT and the intervening vegetation really does minimise the visual impacts to a lot of the potential receivers in the area. And then throughout the development process, we've amended the project footprint to respond to community concerns about the visual impacts. So we have removed arrays, and then changed the connection points, to try and minimise the visual impacts wherever possible.

RICHARD PEARSON: Can I ask a question, which is; because there is significant new landscaping proposed that you're putting in place with, my understanding, using locally endemic or locally native, fast growing species. How much landscaping in total are you proposing? And there are a couple of big – it would actually have to have the visual up of the site, because there were a couple of places where – yeah. So there's a lot of lot of landscaping. There's nothing down that south western end where it's quite close to the ACT border. What's the rationale for that?

BEN CRANSTON: In this area here?

LES SEDDON: A bit further to the south, Ben. So I think south of where the substation there, so you can see there, where Ben's cursor is there, a bit to the northeast, that is a knoll that sticks up in the landscape. So the arrays around that are basically shielded from the ACT due to that knoll. So that's basically why we've taken arrays out of that knoll.

Also, as well, there's some rocky habitat in there, being at the knoll, which is where there was some potential habitat for the striped legless lizard. So we knocked that out in very early stages of the constraints assessment.

So you can see that we've strategically aligned the green shaded areas. So key to

the visual impact assessment is we had a local landscape architect spend a lot of time looking at this, and how we would site the arrays in the landscape. So that's why there's some funny shapes going on. So we've designed it to be hidden away from that knoll, then when it's more visible to the Dunlop residents and to Wallaroo as well, we've managed to sit it down in the middle ground of their views, so both Dunlop and Wallaroo have views out to the Brindabella Ranges in the distance. And we've really tried to site this in the rural landscape, behind transmission lines in most instances so it sits in tucked behind there. So that you have all the hills and the skyline above it, and then the Brindabella Ranges, which are the features of the landscape in the background, again.

So all the different viewpoints around the site have those grasslands in the foreground, and then when it was the degraded farmland that was often dust bowls, or grazed quite heavily and the likes as well, we situated the solar arrays in there. So as you go through the visual impact assessment, you can really see that we always have that sort of slim – sorry, thin sliver of visibility of the arrays in the landscape.

So we've designed the landscape treatments around that. So rather than trying to screen the arrays in their entirety, the landscape architect wants to keep a sense of the landscape character. And so those larger shaded areas are where we have proposed intermittent tree planting. So that's really to break up where you can see the panels to get some of those large endemic trees in there, so it fits in with the landscape, rather than a huge linear buffer in and of itself. So we acknowledge that there will be visibility from different areas, but it's in keeping with how they look across and above the landscape there, that we don't want to block their views into the distance too much as well.

It's a bit harder to see on this slide as well, but you'll see there's some yellow areas there, which is a landscaping buffer. So that's a different type of landscape treatment there, where it's dense native vegetation that's conducive to bee pollination, and those sorts of things. But that's really to block when people are using the Bicentennial Trail, when they're up close to the site. So we have three to five metre high plantings there, so it blocks them being able to see into any of the undercarriage of the arrays there, but still doesn't block the views in the distance to the mountaintops, the Brindabellas and the – I forget the name of the hill in the distance as well. So it's key to understand there's those two different types of treatments, and that's reflected in the two sites that had the moderate potential visual impact without mitigation as well.

RICHARD PEARSON: OK, thanks.

ANDREW MILLS: Can I do a follow up in relation to that? So some of the stuff that was available in terms of visual impacts shows the mitigation, the effect of the mitigation after five years. How tall does the vegetation that you're planting grow vis a vis the height of the panels over time, and what timeframe? Because it looked like they would not be the same height as the panels after five years. But I may have misread what I was looking at.

LES SEDDON: Yeah. So the idea there is that we get some fast growing species in there as well. So there will be some local acacia species that will be pioneer plantings. So we've gone into a lot of consultation with the local Landcare group and Council on all these species here. So there'll be some pioneer species plantings there that grow up quickly, and try and provide that visual minimisation earlier. And then everything around it will grow up over time.

So how height they grow, we'll still do that in consultation with Landcare and the residents if they're interested, as well, because we're really aware that we don't want to get too high to block those views into the distance. We just want to stop people being able to see too much of the undercarriage of the arrays when they're walking up beside them.

And part of that will be as well, so when the arrays – they move during the day. So they're only at that peak height for a certain, like a matter of an hour or so during the middle of the day. So we're conscious of that as well, that we're trying to get that landscaping to grow to the right height to be most effective at most times of the day, when they're actually more horizontal in that early evening and afternoon, trying to capture those sun's rays.

So the height, we've got a bit of flexibility that we can work with as we go through that process for designing the exact landscaping treatments, but we've got that flexibility that we can make them as high or as low as we want. But the key thing is they'll be dense up until that three metre mark. Because when you're up that close to them, like anything at three metres nearby, you're sort of looking up, and you don't see over. So they don't have to be that hugely high.

And then from the distance from the other residential viewpoints, it's more the tree plantings that happen a bit closer as well. So they're really just to fragment those views and get it down a bit. It was quite marginal that it was going to be a moderate impact. So there was only a little bit of the array that we needed to screen there by some canopy foliage. And again, that can be a bit more densely planted as well over time, if that's what the community would be keen to see. But relying on the experts and the landscape architects, that's the best approach to fitting with that landscape there, whilst also achieving that minimisation strictly in accordance with the guidelines.

ANDREW MILLS: Thank you.

BRONWYN EVANS: Before we move on, and Les mentioned the panel tracking, Ben, when we – maybe later in the presentation, will you address the technical aspects of the way the design of the panel array, because we were quite interested in that remote control of the panels for panel tracking. Will that come up later in the presentation, that we can ask those questions?

BEN CRANSTON: Not the technical side on how the panels are controlled. I haven't prepared anything for that, but I can take that on notice.

BRONWYN EVANS: Perhaps I can just ask the question, then; do the panels get tracked with some sort of remote control? Are they sensor driven? One of the questions we were considering was, with extreme weather conditions in Canberra being prone to quite heavy hail storms, is that – how would the panels be tracked or aligned to avoid damage as much as possible?

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, so that will depend on the final selection of the tracking supplier on how they're controlled. But it should be able to – it will be able to be controlled externally to adjust the panels, because that comes up in the glint and glare down the track on how we remove the glare, potential glare. So they can be controlled externally, yes.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: No worries.

LES SEDDON: Just to add to that, obviously, the solar alignment and orientation changes over the years. So the programming works that you have full control and flexibility of what angle they are at any point in time, and you can manually override that if you see a storm approaching, or if any of the panels go out and all those sorts of things. So there's a fair few operational controls, and that's how we've managed to rule out the possibility of glint and glare altogether as well. So glint and glare tend to happen when the panels are more flat, trying to catch that early and late afternoon sun, and it's basically once they've caught that sun and move, we don't track them back to a safe position overnight for another hour or so. So it completely rules out any opportunity for there to be glint or glare generated.

BRONWYN EVANS: Oh, thank you.

RICHARD PEARSON: And is there – pardon my ignorance, Les – but is there someone on site who is monitoring and controlling panels and keeping an eye out for a storm approaching from the southwest, for example? Yeah, is that the way it works, or not?

LES SEDDON: Do you want to answer this Ben, or do you want me to have a go?

BEN CRANSTON: You can go.

LES SEDDON: Yes. So there'll be a couple of operators on site, and everything will be remote controlled through SCADA and telemetry, so they're constantly monitoring all those things as well. So they'll be looking for where things might be out in the system as well, so that they can repair things straight away, or plug things in, depending on what any faults are. So my understanding, Ben, is there'll be between one and three people on site at any point in time responding to those things. But it will all be remotely monitored as well, so that could be picked up

straight away.

Obviously, there's some pretty sophisticated software that responds to clouds and shading and all sorts of things as well, to know and predict how much output there's going to be in the system as well. So there's a lot of smarts in terms of knowing what's going on, and a lot of flexibility in controlling that to maximise the output.

RICHARD PEARSON: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: All right, I'll proceed on with the presentation. OK, so the next slide is on the hazards and risks. Probably the biggest hazard that's come up throughout the process is potential bush fires. It's manageable through the design process and prevention controls, such as installing asset protection zones around key equipment, such as batteries, bunding those batteries.

Also the new site's access road being sealed will make it easier for emergency services to access from Wallaroo through to the ACT, down to Parkwood as well. And that's going to be upgraded and sealed, whereas now, you'll see at the site visit, it's a little dirt track with a lot of potholes.

The contamination risk was a main one that was brought up by the Council. They were concerned about cadmium. There's no cadmium in the solar panels we're proposing. They're more of an older version in thin-film panels, they were present. They're not in the panels that we're proposing for this project.

BRONWYN EVANS: Ben, can I ask a question on that? So what will be the primary element in the panels that are available for you to select, if cadmium is not going to be one of the components?

BEN CRANSTON: So that was in thin-film panels. They are one of the earlier versions of solar panels, thin-film. They've really gone out of favour these days for silicon panels. So polysilicon, mono-silicon. Yeah, so it would be the silicon in the panels, so you would have no problem. And then –

ANDREW MILLS: Can I ask, Ben, where you would expect to source the panels from?

BEN CRANSTON: They'll be from China, realistically.

ANDREW MILLS: And do you have a corporate policy around human trafficking, human –

BRONWYN EVANS: Modern slavery.

ANDREW MILLS: Modern slavery, that kind of thing?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, yes.

ANDREW MILLS: You'll be looking up your supply chain to make sure that that's all covered off as well?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes.

ANDREW MILLS: That's a question that has been asked elsewhere. That's why I raised it for you.

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, yeah, most definitely we will be.

LES SEDDON: Sorry, just to jump in there as well. So yes, that's a common concern amongst the community, based on some historical panels coming out of different places as well. But we're well aware – Ben's well aware, Wallaroo Solar Farm is well aware of the Modern Slavery Act and having to be compliant with that, as they as everyone does under the regulation. So they have an internal policy document on that, and are well aware of it, and that will be implemented in their selection process going forward if they get approval.

ANDREW MILLS: Thanks.

BEN CRANSTON: OK. And then on to extreme weather. We see the biggest concerns, as mentioned earlier, would likely be the hail, hail storm events. The panels are tested in accordance with the standards they are hail tested. That doesn't mean that they don't sometimes break, but there is very little risk of contamination from broken panels, because due to the nature of the solar farm, it needs to make money, so it will be replaced. Panels will be replaced rather quickly, and so the hail damage is more of an operational concern, rather than an environmental risk.

Other risks that have been raised on the project and have been avoided, to an extent, is the batteries. Rather than having all the batteries centralised in one location, they're dispersed throughout the project. They'll have their own asset protection zones around them with bunding to keep everything in the event of an event. Yeah, everything's localised and kept within its own area.

ANDREW MILLS: So just on those batteries, and you've answered one of our questions, actually, so thank you for that. There's reference to nine batteries, but there's 36 containers, I think.

BEN CRANSTON: Yes. So the nine batteries, the inverters that the batteries connect to – so there's 36 containers of batteries connecting into nine central battery locations.

ANDREW MILLS: So certainly – sorry, just to unpack that a little bit more, does that mean that you have four located, co-located for every battery?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, yes, that's correct.

ANDREW MILLS: Thanks.

BEN CRANSTON: No problem.

LES SEDDON: Sorry, just on that, yes, just to clarify that, there's nine current locations throughout the site where they're located. And at each inverter there, there's two batteries either side of it aligned in linear. So linear is gives you much better safety characteristics as well, because you can get that separation distance end-to-end. And so it's really the lowest risk configuration that we could come up with as well. And that's got the ability to be moved around the site, up in those localities, to be best placed in amongst all the arrays as well. So we had the flexibility there to move them further away than any receivers and all sorts of things. So it really is the lowest risk configuration.

ANDREW MILLS: Did they require their own footings?

LES SEDDON: Ben, are they on piers or on pads?

BEN CRANSTON: It'll be on pads.

ANDREW MILLS: So do the pads move as well, then, in that situation, if you need to move them around?

LES SEDDON: Oh, sorry, I was referring only to in detailed design. Like we still have a lot of flexibility to where we locate them in those areas, and all our noise and receiver studies have been measured around that, just putting them in the worst case areas, so we can move them around readily. But once we have to build those foundations and put them there, obviously they're there.

ANDREW MILLS: Right, OK. When you said you could move them around, I thought you meant you could actually, during the course of operations, move them.

LES SEDDON: No, just move them around in the final detailed design that happens from here as well. Just reiterating that we've got flexibility still going into the future to put them in the best possible location.

RICHARD PEARSON: Having said that, I'm assuming, and I haven't interrogated this issue in detail, that there is a kind of a broad footprint in which they have to live? You can't just stick them where you want. The each of those nine locations has some flexibility within it. Is that what you're saying?

LES SEDDON: Yeah, it's hard to see on this figure, but you can see like they obviously have to service a certain footprint and field of arrays. So roughly those yellow lines on the map, they're internal access roads that are related to where batteries will be put in different locations, all through there.

RICHARD PEARSON: Right, so your EIS doesn't pinpoint where they will be,

and nor does the Department's approval, is that what you're saying?

LES SEDDON: We show the most likely spots, and that's what we use for assessment. So we try and predict where's most likely, and what's also worst case, or a mix of balancing those, so that we know that we can move them around and still be with any of those performance characteristics that are conditioned in the consent. So saying that, I can't see why they would change from where we're showing them on some other figures, because it really is a good location for them.

RICHARD PEARSON: OK, thanks.

BEN CRANSTON: OK, so with the project amendments, throughout the EIS process, we've obviously had to respond to community concerns, issues raised, environmental constraints that have arisen. The biggest changes that we've made, the amendments that we made to the project, would be the removal of panels from certain areas of the project, predominantly to reduce visual impacts. But also responding to – you can see in Area 1 up here – sorry, in Area 1, panels were removed from that location due to the proximity to the properties in this area. So to give them a bit of a gap there. But also the fact that it was Ginninderra Creek right there, there was some potential heritage issues there. So we removed panels from there.

This area here, panels, Area 2, panels were removed for both visual impacts and environmental constraints. That was up on the hill, they would have been very visible to the ACT. But also the fact that the striped legless lizard habitat there, the potential for striped legless lizards there, so those were removed. And then in Area 3 here, panels were removed from that area in response to views from Canberra residents. These panels went slightly up a hill, so they increased the visual impacts. They were removed to reduce them.

RICHARD PEARSON: So they were all removed post the EIS exhibition period, is that correct?

BEN CRANSTON: No, the Area 1, this area to the south and the north, they were pre-EIS exhibition from initial project design, they were included. They were removed pre-EIS. And then this area here was post-EIS.

RICHARD PEARSON: So Area 3?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes.

RICHARD PEARSON: Do you think the community is well aware of that change that's been made, the Area 3 removal?

BEN CRANSTON: No, not yet.

RICHARD PEARSON: You don't think they are?

BEN CRANSTON: No, we haven't pushed that out yet. But they definitely will be.

LES SEDDON: Yeah, just to jump in there as well. So it wasn't necessarily in response to any of the scientific, the quantitative, visual impact assessment that was a requirement to remove that there, to get it below a moderate impact, or anything like that. It was already quite a low to a very low visual impact in that area. But it was just taken out because it still did lessen that maximum visibility anymore from a few places. It was a gesture of good faith, that was the only spot that we could take them out and still maintain the viability and the feasibility of all the arrays.

So that was more in discussion with the Department of Planning and where we could concede taking out some areas if possible, that would have some benefit to receivers. But it wasn't necessarily in response to any of the performance objectives in the guidelines that we needed to do that; it was more a gesture of good faith to minimise visibility even further wherever we could. And it was in response to the proponent having an understanding of the technology that we're likely to be using, that we still get that generation out of the farm with the increasing technology that's now available as well.

BRONWYN EVANS: And if I may ask a follow-on question from that, when you looked at all of the submissions and considered the issues raised by the community and those submissions, were there other changes to the design or location that were made in response to those submissions?

LES SEDDON: At the response to submission stage? Yes. No, there wasn't that much at all, to be clear. It was more clarifications around how it all came together at the response to submissions, there were no glaring issues that needed a physical and design response.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: And the other change would be the transport route. So initially we had the transport route, the access route, coming Wallaroo Road, and then down Southwell Road. So rather than turning left into the project from Gooromon Ponds Road, it would have come Wallaroo Road and straight down Southwell Road. We changed that to go via Gooromon Ponds Road, because out off Southwell Road, there's a lot of gully remediation works occurring. So there's a lot of truck movements already going that way. So rather than compete for road access; separate it as much as possible. So that's the reason we chose the current route.

Then Ginninderry Estate. One of the issues raised, Ginninderry Estates is – we've dealt with them throughout the whole process. They're very supportive of the project. Riverview Group, who's the project manager for Ginninderry, they've been very supportive of the process. It seems as though everybody else brings up Ginninderry as a concern, whereas Ginninderry themselves don't actually raise

any concerns.

We did go back to them through the response to submission stage to do some extra viewpoints, because concerns were raised about the visual impacts. We've gone back to Ginninderry with the results of that. They don't have any concerns there. Further concerns were raised by – they were raised regarding the noise at Ginninderry. We've gone back, reassessed that. We chose points within the Ginninderry development which aren't going to be – there's not going to be any buildings there for probably another 15 years, but we chose the closest points to the project. They came back no concerns, under the allowable levels at the closest residential areas there.

And as part of the project, Ginninderry has a SPARK program. So it's an employment training for the local community. Part of their community benefit fund, I guess. And we're going to be working with them to help deliver some training, onsite training as part of our project.

So community benefits, moving on to the community benefits. The employment and business; 150 to 200 employees during the peak construction. Operational employees; four to five full time employees. The Ginninderry SPARK program, running the training and apprenticeship programs. That's outside of our VPA, that's just totally as part of the project.

The community benefit fund, as part of the VPA. That's $150,000 for the first year, 50, it was originally $50,000 per annum. That's been increased to $55,000 per annum after consultation with Yass Council. The Localvolts, which we were asked about, we're offering discounted energy through Localvolts, who's a peer-to-peer trading, energy trading platform. We can do that because the projects will have 70% of the power it produces contracted under a power purchase agreement, and 30% is available to anybody within a seven kilometre radius. Any residents or small business within a seven kilometre radius, they'll be available to access discounted energy. And that's the discount – sorry.

RICHARD PEARSON: Yes, and so will that apply to ACT as well? Or do you have to be in New South Wales? No?

BEN CRANSTON: No, no. So it's just within a radius, seven kilometre radius. They will need to sign, change their energy provider. We can't contract it at the moment, because of laws around [unintelligible 00:39:39] energy supply agreements. They can't be more than 12 months period. So we can't contract it at the moment, but it's definitely something we will be offering.

BRONWYN EVANS: So Ben, before we leave this slide, I'd like to ask not just about employment, but also accommodation during construction. You could have up to 200 people. Are you also developing an accommodation strategy?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, definitely. The project's aim is to hire locally, first and foremost, and then outside of that, work with providers to see where

accommodation is available. We've spoken with the Yass Business Chamber about this. That's been raised as a concern. But on the other hand, we've also had accommodation providers in Yass reach out to us, asking us about providing accommodations. So it will be a fine line, but we do have a plan in place there to minimise the impacts.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you.

LES SEDDON: Just to jump in there if I can. So the social impact assessment has picked up on this, and had quite a few interviews with local and wider entities. So we're quite fortunate at this site, and it's partly why this is such a good location, is that we do have flexibility here. So we've had a lot of interest from Yass and Murrumbateman area that they would like to maximise economic benefits from employment and accommodation and the likes as well. So we have got a lot of flexibility to work in with them to prioritise sending business their way. But we've still got the fallback option of Canberra is quite a large city, and there's obviously a lot of accommodation in there, and a wide diversity and array of that accommodation that we can manage well as well.

Because both those localities are reasonably central as well, it gives us a lot of flexibility in even using shuttle buses and things to get to site to minimise some of those other impacts. So it's in quite a fortunate position, quite strategic from Wallaroo Solar Farm's perspective, that we do have a lot of flexibility there to work with those local service providers, and either maximise their benefit, or go into Canberra to find alternatives if need be.

BEN CRANSTON: OK. So moving on to the Voluntary Planning Agreements. During consultation with Council, they provided us with a draft Voluntary Planning Agreement that they've used for the Sutton Solar Farm. We've gone and reviewed that, we're happy with that. The only thing that's changed during the discussions with Council was the increase to our proposed amounts from $50,000 per annum up to $55,000 per annum, to keep it in line with their expectations.

ANDREW MILLS: Was that the index, Ben?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, yes. Sorry, index, definitely.

ANDREW MILLS: Thank you.

BEN CRANSTON: And then the panel. So the panel who will decide where the funds go, that will be made up of two Council representatives, two community representatives. We've asked Council that they be close to the solar farm and not located in Yass. And then one company, one project representative as well, with Council managing the funds.

So glint and glare was raised by the Department as a potential issue, raised by community members as a potential issue. During the EIS and the visual impact assessment, we completed a glint and glare assessment, that came back with the

potential for high levels of yellow glare at a number of receivers around the area. But while atmospheric conditions –

RICHARD PEARSON: Sorry, Ben, can you just clarify what yellow glare is? I mean, is just glare, or is it a particular kind of glare?

BEN CRANSTON: Yeah, so there's green glare, and there's yellow glare. Yellow glare is the glare that you'll get off, say, windows in the distance as the sun is setting, I believe. Is that correct Les, can you confirm that?

LES SEDDON: I think that's close to it. So the background to this is, throughout the whole project, the assessment requirements changed a lot. We hit, I guess it's not a sweet spot, it's probably more unfortunate than anything, we hit this period where all the guidelines were changing a lot. The Department of Planning at the time brought out new guidelines for large scale solar farms, and there was some glint and glare information in there. And then it changed a bit again as well. So we've done this several times, is why it looks like we've been trying to come up with more and more.

But at the end of the day, there's some performance objectives outlined in the Large Scale Solar Guidelines for glint and glare. So it talks about assessing, and how you model, and it tells you what the green and yellow are. And then it tells you that yellow should be minimised. Green sort of falls off, because it's not really an issue for residents as such. And anything to do with yellow you then go away then and look at it in more detail.

The modelling doesn't allow for intervening vegetation and structures. So the results we're getting were just like a terrain model, that was all worst case scenario, and just that was theoretically viable. But fortunately, in the meantime, whilst we were doing the assessments, some further software updates came out that we could look at this in a lot more detail. You can now put in that intervening vegetation and structure information, but we basically just used it to design some operational controls, so there was no opportunity for glare to be generated.

The glare we're talking about is only for a couple of minutes at between like five and 8:30 in the morning, depending on what time of year it is as well. So it's really only for like 15 minutes over a whole year that there were potentially some issues. So we've just designed that out through operational control so that it just can't do that anymore, is the long but simple answer. This stuff can take hours to thrash out, particularly if you have a specialist in the room. But, yeah, it's really overcome and achievable in the environment or the guidelines.

BEN CRANSTON: So moving on to the transport and traffic route, I've touched on this during the amendment slide. But the access will be – or the proposed access is from the Barton Highway, accessing through Wallaroo Road, Gooromon Ponds Road, then turning left into the project site. As part of the project, we're proposing upgrading and widening Southwell Road down through the project, so that will be sealed as well. And also some minor road widening at the Barton

Highway/Wallaroo Road intersection, to allow for B double access through. Because at the moment, presently, the data shows that they'll be mounting the kerb slightly so, some slight upgrades there.

LES SEDDON: Just to jump – oh, sorry, you're about to talk about it now. No, you go. Next slide.

BEN CRANSTON: OK, so for the oversize, those over-mass vehicles coming down, most of the equipment will be coming from Sydney. It will be coming down the Hume Highway, and then, rather than coming down the Federal Highway and through Canberra and into the project that way, oversized, over-mass will be going, is proposed to go through, past the Yass bypass along the Barton Highway, and then into Wallaroo Road from that way, to avoid the traffic, traffic lights and congestion in Canberra for the oversized, over-mass vehicles.

LES SEDDON: Just to be clear here, we've noticed some commentary on this today in some local and state media as well. Due to the determination assessment showing this route in an appendix as well, it seems like the community might have got confused and assume all traffic is coming via this route shown on the screen now. This route is only going to be used by seven oversized, over-mass vehicles through the life of construction, operation and decommissioning. So over the next 30 years, there will probably be three during construction, one during operation, and three during commissioning, or thereabouts, as well. But it's only seven vehicles. The rest of the traffic is coming down through Canberra and back across there as well. So we won't be generating – we'll be generating seven vehicle movements in Yass from delivery vehicles.

BEN CRANSTON: And then the rest is additional information that I included that wasn't on the agenda. So happy to leave it there if you like, if you have any questions?

RICHARD PEARSON: What's the current community engagement then? Or is it kind of just, have you kind of dropped away now that it's in the approval stage?

BEN CRANSTON: No, no, no, we haven't dropped away. I was waiting to confirm, or I would have asked at this meeting, confirm that we will have the site inspection next week. I was going to send an update out tonight or tomorrow morning, and inform everyone of where we're at. I just wanted to get the correct information before I did send that out.

LES SEDDON: I guess from NGH, NGH has been involved in the community consultation the whole way through as well. And Ben has been quite active talking and communicating toward the Wallaroo residents in particular, through the life of the project. So he's offered individual site visits with all of them, and is in contact whenever they need to reach out to him, to his mobile phone there as well.

The challenge has been getting communication materials to the wider Canberra and Dunlop area, but we've done all that we can there in terms of a couple mass

mailouts and several community information sessions and the like as well. There's been lots of good access for people to get directly to Ben, and to us to answer any questions as well.

BRONWYN EVANS: And how many people have taken up that opportunity to make direct contact or for a site visit?

BEN CRANSTON: A lot. I've been out to – I've knocked on every door on Gooromon Ponds Road, definitely. I've met with most, I'd say I met with most of the landowners along Gooromon Ponds Road, especially, and also a lot in the ACT. I've been to a fair few houses there to meet with people who had concerns.

BRONWYN EVANS: And what were the issues that they raised? What was the range of topics?

BEN CRANSTON: The predominant one, from both sides, from the ACT and from Wallaroo, I'd say would be visual impacts, with the traffic, probably from the Wallaroo residents, being a close second.

ANDREW MILLS: And what's the temperature like at those discussions?

BEN CRANSTON: It's actually been surprisingly good. Everyone's been, yeah, really good about it. Obviously, not everybody's totally happy about the proposed project, but yeah, the temperature's been fine. They had nobody going off or anything like that. So it's been quite good.

LES SEDDON: In terms of process it's been really effective, and there's been no uncertainty of what the concerns are amongst the communities. So that's been really good in allowing us to address them with confidence, and get that information back out there.

It's been quite interesting, obviously, we know what the issues are for the New South Wales residents, but also the Canberra residents have been rather surprising as well. There have been a few issues and concerns about visual, but also a lot of community support as well, and the odd offer to invest in the project, and just help it out.

But one of the key things we did very early on as well, before the new technical supplement guidelines came out, is that some of those people that we knew had visibility over the site, we offered them artist illustrations of the site before the new technical requirements came out for photo montages and the new guidelines as well. So we've offered that to all the Wallaroo residents very early on, so they can understand what they might be looking at, outside of then seeing it in an EIS before the visual impact ratings and the likes as well. So we've had some really good discussions.

RICHARD PEARSON: Do you feel that the opposition has reduced through the – because there were quite a lot of submissions to the EIS. It will be interesting to

see how many the Commission gets, because we do run a submission process as well. But do you, from your perspective, do you feel that people are across the changes that have been made to the project to attempt to deal with issues that they've raised, or there's still some – seems like there's still some confusion about transport routes, for example, that could be fuelling community concern. Or do you feel people generally understand how the project has been modified to respond to concerns raised?

BEN CRANSTON: I'd say generally –

LES SEDDON: I think – you go Ben, sorry.

BEN CRANSTON: You go Les, all good.

LES SEDDON: No, I think the opportunity is there. From a process point of view, we've got a really good understanding of concerns early on, and we've allowed people to understand how those concerns might materialise and what they will look like, or what they will be. So we've had really effective engagement there.

In terms of opposition, you can't always change people's mindsets; like if they don't want a solar farm there, they don't want a solar farm there. But we've definitely been able to work with them to understand the impacts to them, whether it's visibility or traffic coming by, and things like that. So we think there's a good understanding of most of the people concerned that are linked to the impacts. There's still obviously a bit of misunderstanding out there amongst the community of those that don't take the time to read the detail we have, or don't turn up to information sessions in the operating off of their understanding. We're focused on –

RICHARD PEARSON: You're not going to eliminate opposition, but the most important thing is for people to understand how you've adapted your project, to try to respond to concerns. I think when we have the – if indeed we have a public meeting next week, that that's a useful role for the Applicant to take, is to not necessarily do a do a sell job on your project, but to run through how you've attempted to address concerns raised through visual screening, transport issues, etc, so that the people can understand they haven't just made a submission that's been ignored. Where possible, there have been some changes made to the project. I think that's a useful role for you to play in the public domain.

LES SEDDON: Understood, yep.

BEN CRANSTON: Definitely agreed.

BRONWYN EVANS: Can I ask a question about your discussions with Yass Valley Council? Their original submission was to oppose the project, and part of that was related to zoning and the buffer area. How was the consultation with Yass Valley Council, and have you had any more recent ones?

BEN CRANSTON: We've had some additional consultation after the objection. We did go out there and meet with Chris Berry, the CEO, trying to address those concerns. But yeah, it was obviously very hard to change their opinions on that. Some of the items we could agree on; the VPA being one of them. There was some misunderstanding around the VPA. That was cleared up rather easily. Around the buffer zone from the ACT, that was one thing that we couldn't come to an agreement on.

LES SEDDON: Just to expand on that again, so we did a Councillor briefing in the project as well, once we started having lots of the impact assessment coming together. So we spoke to the Councillors online there when there was COVID stuff happening as well, and offered them more briefings. Not all the Councillors were present at that meeting, so a few new things came up in their submission that we'd already talked about at that meeting that came up again.

And some of their concerns around the Yass Valley Settlement Strategy as well, like we've addressed them from the planting point of view and the intent of those documentations. It isn't always the same conversation we might have with the elected members. So the Settlement Strategy itself was an earlier strategic document in 2019, that was then updated and given more effect by the Strategic Planning Statement that came out later and clarified what was going on in there. So the intent of that strategic approach is that to limit residential development in that 5K buffer, and prevent speculative development.

So we put a lot of information in the response to the submission on how that is interpreted in a planning sense, and try to draw attention as well to it is state government policy that solar farms are best located in these rural areas, and in accordance with the guideline and achieving all the performance objectives, they are in keeping with rural and landscape character, both from an agricultural production point of view and visually as well.

So we've really pointed out in there how it is consistent with the intent of that strategic planning document. But it doesn't take away that there's some people that don't necessarily like it in that area, and we see some sort of oppositional feedback coming back around it, being industrial developments in the planning system as it is, and in the way we can assess solar farms. They're not industrial developments, and they are best placed in these rural areas where there's transmission lines and electricity infrastructure. We need to connect to those, and it is the best place for them, as long as we can show compliance with those performance objectives in the guideline, which we've done.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you. If I may, one other point that they raise; in the event that the project is approved, they would want the project to be commenced within five years of consent, and being then completed within five years of commencement. Is that timeframe possible for a solar farm of this size?

BEN CRANSTON: Yes, definitely. We would expect construction to start within

12 to 18 months of approval, if it does get approved, and then another 18 months for the construction period. Two years at the outside it should be generating power.

LES SEDDON: And just to add to that as well, that's reflected in all the assessments. So the first part of the question is that yes, that standard assessment and approvals process that they need to commence within those five years, it's in everyone's interest to do that, in this case as well, from a financial point of view. But in terms of yes, it needs to be constructed within the timeframe that has been assessed in the EIS, which is well within that five years. So the level of impacts to surrounding receivers and the likes through construction reflects that.

ANDREW MILLS: Have you got the financials lined up to actually undertake, with loans, equity, whatever it is that you're going to use to get going with it? Or is that – do you wait for the actual approval to come through before you actually line those things up?

BEN CRANSTON: So it won't be us owning the project through to the operational stage. We'll be exiting the project before construction starts to a much larger company, who has the financial backing to be able to build a project of this size.

ANDREW MILLS: Right, OK. In terms of the Department's assessment and recommended conditions of consent, do you have any comments, observations you'd like to share with us?

BEN CRANSTON: At present, where we reviewed the draft conditions, we had some comments on that, but everything, we're happy with everything they've put forward. Les, did you have anything?

LES SEDDON: No, I think the determination report reflects where we've been. We've worked quite closely with Planning under their different names as it's changed over the last couple of years. And we've been through a lot with them as well, basically pioneering application of the new guidelines as they've changed, and working closely with them to make sure it is feasible and approvable, and reflects all the requirements they have.

ANDREW MILLS: Great. Richard or Bronwyn, any final questions?

RICHARD PEARSON: No I'm good. Thank you.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you.

ANDREW MILLS: Well, thank you very much. Thank you very much for the time and slide pack and the discussion. It's been very helpful. And look forward to seeing you next week, I guess, out on site.

BEN CRANSTON: Brilliant. Thank you very much for your time.

BRONWYN EVANS: Thank you.

LES SEDDON: A pleasure. Thank you.

RICHARD PEARSON: Thank you. Thanks all.

BRONWYN EVANS: Bye.

LES SEDDON: Thank you, bye.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED