



New South Wales Government
Independent Planning Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: WALLAROO SOLAR FARM (SSD-9261283)

PUBLIC MEETING

PANEL: MR ANDREW MILLS (CHAIR)
DR BRONWYN EVANS AM
MR RICHARD PEARSON

SPEAKERS: BEN CRANSTON
ANDREW CUNICH
RAFE CHAMPION
MARIJANA DI IULIO
MARILYN GENDEK
SENATOR GERARD RENNICK
JOHN MCGRATH
GRANT PIPER
MARK JOHNSTONE
ALAN MORAN
RAMILA CHANISHEFF
ADAM GRESHAM
DENNIS ARMSTRONG
LOUIS SARTOR
KATEY BATTENALLY
DEREK WHITCOMBE
LACHLAN BUTLER
BEN FAULKS
BERNARD O'BRIEN
PETER CAIN
AMANDA CLARK
NICK O'LEARY
MARGARET ARMSTRONG
STAN MOORE
LACHLAN MCCAFFREY
LYNETTE LABLACK
IWAN DAVIES

LOCATION: MURRUMBATEMAN COMMUNITY HALL

DATE: 10:00AM – 14:24PM
THURSDAY, 18TH JULY 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

5 **MR ANDREW MILLS:** And welcome to the Independent Planning Commission’s public meeting into the state significant development application for the Wallaroo Solar Farm, SSD-9261283. I’m speaking to you from Ngunnawal land. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the countries from which we meet today. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to the elders from other communities who may be participating today.

10 I’m Andrew Mills and I am the chair of the Independent Planning Commission and of this panel. Joining me are my fellow Commissioners, Dr Bronwyn Evans and Richard Pearson.

15 No conflicts of interest have been identified in relation to our determination of this development application. We have a limited and specific role at the end of the planning process. We decide if an application should go ahead and if so, on what conditions. We consider the Department’s assessment report, the application, your written and oral submissions and other materials that the planning law requires us to consider. All of these materials are either already publicly available or will be
20 made available on our website.

In making a decision on this case, the Commission must obey all relevant laws and consider all applicable policies and the public interest. We also need to consider public submissions and that is the purpose of today. We want to hear what you
25 think about the merits of the application. This is not a forum for submissions on whether or not you like or approve of the Applicant or the laws we must obey or the policies we must consider.

30 The application has already been assessed by the Department on our behalf. Many of you have already participated in the Department’s processes and we thank you for that participation. There’s no need to repeat your previous submissions, they are all available to us for consideration. The Applicant and the Department have considered your submissions and taken them into account in the application and assessment and conditions we’re considering today.

35 Today we want to hear your response to the Department’s assessment, recommendations and the recommended conditions. Even if your submission today objects to the application being approved at all, we encourage you to tell us whether any of your concerns could be addressed, either wholly or in part by the
40 imposition of conditions. Your consideration of alternatives does not in any way compromise your submission and it enables the panel to consider all options.

45 We will then proceed to hear from our registered speakers. While we endeavour to stick to our published schedule, this will be dependent on registered speakers being ready to present at their allocated times. I will introduce each speaker when it’s their turn to present to the panel. Everyone has been advised in advance how long they have to speak. A bell will sound when a speaker has one minute remaining. A second bell will sound when a speaker’s time has expired.

To ensure that everyone receives their fair share of time, I will enforce timekeeping rules. Extensions may be granted on a case by case basis by the panel chair, however in the interests of fairness to other registered speakers, an extension
5 may also not be granted.

If you have a copy of your speaking notes or any additional material to support your presentation, it would be appreciated if you could provide a copy to the Commission. Please note any information given to the Commission may be made
10 public. The Commission's privacy statement governs its approach to managing your information and is available on the Commission's website.

Exits from this venue in the case of emergency are located at either side of the hall and the toilets are located external to the building. Firstly, we'll hear from the
15 Applicant. At the conclusion of the public meeting, we will hear from the Applicant and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to answer any questions or respond to any issues raised during the public meeting. Could I ask as a courtesy that you turn your phones to silent. I'll ask Ben Cranston to come forward and speak on behalf of the Applicant, Wallaroo Solar Farms.

MR BEN CRANSTON: Before I start, I'd like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional owners of the land of Wallaroo Solar Farm
20 [unintelligible 00:23:30] pay our respects to all elders present, past and future.

Wallaroo Solar Farm is a joint development between Univergy Solar, an established renewable energy company which operates projects around the world and New Energy Development. We're a Canberra based renewable energy
25 company specialising in large scale solar farm developments and across Australia we currently have approximately [unintelligible 00:23:58] solar farms.

I would like to start off by acknowledging that we believe the Department's assessment report accurately represents and summarises our proposal
30 [unintelligible 00:24:08] results of the assessment [unintelligible 00:24:11]. Wallaroo Solar Farm is pleased with the Department's recommended [unintelligible 00:24:16] like to thank the Department for their guidance throughout the development process.

Can we go next slide? Thank you. The project was first floated in 2019 when discussions with local landowners commenced. The two properties were identified
40 as being ideal for a project of this scope and size for multiple reasons, including direct access to onsite transmission infrastructure, being close to the load centre of Canberra, minimal biodiversity and heritage impacts and a land soil capability of four across the majority of the site with minimal impacts to surrounding properties.

Initial constraints analysis further informed the viability of the project and this was followed by the lodgement of the scoping report and request for SEARs from the Department in 2020. The project was then hit by delays due to COVID-19 with
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onsite surveys and community engagement to inform the EIS starting in 2021.

5 Community consultation on both sides of the border started for the project with
community mail outs and two information sessions held in February and May of
2021. Two further sessions were also held in July 2022 and another two sessions
in June of 2023 to coincide with the public exhibition stage. This was done
alongside sponsored posts on social media, website updates and extensive face to
face conversations through doorknocking in the Wallaroo area. Consultation
10 continued throughout this period through emails, phone calls and meetings, both
online and in person at residents' homes if requested.

15 The EIS went on public exhibition in May 2023 with a project's response to
submission completed in November of that year. The amendment report in May
2024, the project was then referred to the IPC in June with a recommendation of
approval. Next slide, please. Yes, cool.

20 We believe the Wallaroo Solar Farm aligns with local, regional and state planning
guidelines and adheres to the New South Wales Large Scale Solar Energy
Guideline by being located in an area with good solar resource and available
capacity, minimal impacts to the project and surrounding lands, avoiding high
quality agricultural lands and having connection capacity next to the load centre of
Canberra.

25 It adheres to the South East Tablelands Regional Plan by assisting the region to
become a hub of renewable energy excellence and the Yass Valley Settlement
Strategy by maintaining agricultural use and production over the short and long
term, maintaining rural landscape character and limiting the potential for
residential development, urban sprawl and conflicting land uses. Slide, please.

30 The project is located across two properties with a total land area of approximately
390 hectares with a disturbance footprint of 165 hectares. The disturbance
footprint includes approximately 16 hectares of native vegetation plantings to
minimise visual impacts as well as upgrades to Southwell Road and existing
access tracks. The tilt access arrays are spaced with 5–10 metre gaps between the
35 rows to provide ample space for grazing between and beneath the panels. Much of
the project has been extensively cleared of woody vegetation and highly modified
by historical farming practices and currently runs sheep and cattle with sheep
continuing to graze post-construction if approved.

40 The collocation of sheep grazing with the solar farm footprint allows the project to
maximise land usage while helping with the vegetation management. There is
anecdotal evidence that shows an increase of up to 15% in wool production when
grazing is collocated with solar projects.

45 With the proposed project requiring less than 50% of the overall area of the two
farms, existing farming infrastructure outside the operational footprint will remain
unchanged while sheepyards are to be relocated outside the development footprint
to allow for continuous grazing within the two properties. Next slide, please.

Thank you.

5 During the community and stakeholder consultation and public submissions, one of the main concerns raised was the potential for visual impacts of the project. The project had by this point engaged a local landscape architect whose local knowledge informed the project on array locations to minimise visual impacts to surrounding properties. This combined with further consultation from community groups informed vegetation selection for screen plantings to break up potential views of the project.

10 Visual impact was further addressed by agreeing with the Department to update the project's visual impact assessment to be in line with the, at the time, draft Large Scale Solar Energy Guidelines that were introduced midway through the development of this project. The updated visual impact assessment showed that while the project is visible from multiple locations, the impacts were found to be low and very low from most viewpoints with four representative viewpoints in the ACT having the potential for moderate impacts.

20 After detailed assessment that took into account intervening vegetation and proposed mitigation measures, these viewpoint impacts were assessed as low in accordance with the guidelines. Next one, please. And next, yes, sorry. Yes, and if we go to the next one, thank you.

25 Throughout the development process, the project has been responsive to community and stakeholder feedback regarding the potential impacts of the project. These concerns were addressed by Wallaroo Solar Farm at multiple stages throughout the development process. Project amendments that were undertaken to avoid visual impacts include the removal of panels in the area marked one, so the top right of the slide there, in the northeast corner of the project. This reduced the potential for visual impact on nearby neighbours on Gooromon Ponds Road and Southwell Road.

35 Further to this, removal of panels from area two on the slide, so the circle at the bottom of the slide, sorry, these panels were originally located on the hill in the southeast corner of the project and were removed to reduce sight of the project in Dunlop and MacGregor. Panels were also removed from the area three on the slide, so the blue area that's circled. This area was removed during the amendment report stage after receiving feedback from the community during the response to submissions and was completed as a way to further decrease the potential visual impacts to both Wallaroo and ACT residents.

40 Operational amendments to the way the panels track the sun were also completed at the amendment stage to avoid glint and glare to all non-associated receivers. This is done by avoiding placing panels at certain angles at certain times of the day. Amendments to avoid environmental impacts include installing an onsite substation in place of transmission lines to the existing Canberra substation to avoid native grasslands and golden sun moth habitat as well as avoidance of native vegetation and rocky habitats throughout the overall area of the two sites.

Further updates were done to the transport routes and these include avoiding Southwell Road between Wallaroo Road and Brooklands Road to minimise cumulative impacts with the planned gully remediation works in that area. And only having oversize over mass vehicles access the project through the Yass Valley Way and Murrumbateman, with all other B-double movements accessing the site through the Federal Highway. And also committing to avoiding truck movements during the school bus drop off and pick up times in the Wallaroo area. Next slide, please. Thank you.

Wallaroo Solar Farm has been in consultation with the Yass Valley Council regarding the voluntary planning agreement for the project. Yass Valley Council provided a draft copy of their preferred voluntary planning agreement of which we have agreed to. Initially the project proposed the payment of 50,000 per annum. This was increased to \$55,000 per annum at the response to submissions stage to keep in line with Council expectations. This combined with \$150,000 payment in the first year will mean that a total of over \$1.6 million will be contributed to the community projects over the expected 30 year life of the project.

Further to this, the project will employ between 150 and 200 full-time employees during peak construction with an employment policy focusing on local employment first. A further four to five full-time employees during the operational life of the project will be required while injecting funds into the local economy during the construction and operational phase of the project.

If the project is approved, we will remove approximately 215,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere per annum. Thank you. Are there any questions? Any questions, Commissioners?

MR RICHARD PEARSON: I do have one question. In relation to the landscaping that you're proposing, which the condition requires that it be implemented prior to commencing operation. Should the Commission approve your project, when would you be committing to actually implementing the screening because it's an important visual mitigation measure that you're proposing. Have you got a timeline on that?

MR CRANSTON: I don't have a timeline yet. I'll have to take that on notice because that will involve consultation with Landcare and other community groups about what to plant.

MR PEARSON: Okay. But the requirement is that it's done prior to commencing operation and you have no –

MR CRANSTON: Yes. No issues with that at all.

MR PEARSON: – issue with that?

MR CRANSTON: No issue with that.

MR PEARSON: Okay. All right. Thank you.

MR CRANSTON: Thank you.

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MR MILLS: Thank you, Ben. Now, this next speaker on the telephone is Rafe Champion. Thank you, Rafe. Rafe, you're welcome to commence. Seem to be having difficulties with Rafe at the moment so we might just see whether our next speaker, Andrew Cunich, I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly, is ready. Thank you. Thanks for stepping in.

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MR ANDREW CUNICH: Okay. Thank you, Commissioners, for the opportunity to talk today and for hosting the meeting. I'd like to preface my comments by stating that I support renewable energy. Our family has a 25 kilowatt solar system that we've installed with Tesla Powerwall and backup generator that will run on biodiesel at great expense and a small point but we made sure we put that in a place that didn't affect anybody's view.

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So we live directly opposite on the north side of the proposed solar farm. I understand you visited there yesterday, so if you came around Gooromon Ponds, you would've all of a sudden seen this magnificent valley with the Brindabellas at the back, well we're just on the right-hand side on the hill overlooking. That's our view. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the personal impact on my family, on then the Wallaroo community and the Canberra suburban impact.

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But I want to finish addressing what I believe is the fundamental flaw involved in the decision to consider this to be in the public's best interest because in my view the utilitarian common good notion is very subjective and in this case in particular involves many vested interests.

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So we purchased our property in 2016. We only went out to the auction because a friendly agent invited us to come out. We didn't even take our chequebook and when we pulled up at the front, the auction was held at the front of the house, we actually bought the view. Then we had to rush to find the chequebook, go back into town. Absolutely magnificent view, paid a premium for the view and have never regretted it. It's a wonderful, wonderful lifestyle. We've worked hard, we've planned, we've sacrificed to have that lifestyle.

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Now, you can't tell me that if we were selling the property tomorrow that (a) anyone would be interested in buying it with all this uncertainty or (b) that we would get any sort of compensation for that lack of view. So when Daniel Flynn and I wonder if Daniel's here today to back this up, I don't think so, but Daniel said to me, "What would it be worth? What's your view worth?" And I said, "Well, it's priceless. It's absolutely priceless."

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I said, "It's a million dollar view" and I said, "A few solar panels on the roof's not going to compensate for that." And I said, "Even if you did offer us a million dollars, we wouldn't sell because that's our lifestyle." We don't spend much time

inside our house, we're always outside. We sit on the veranda and we look at the view. So imagine if you bought yourself a brand new telly and somebody came out with a black Texta and just went right across the centre of it and said, "Enjoy your TV." So that's the impact it's had on the value and sure, as a neighbour said to me last night, "We never want to sell, so what's it really matter?" It's also impacted on the optionality of our property.

So for instance, we were at advanced stages of planning for a trufflery because we feel that a truffle farm in that area would be a fantastic thing for future generations because we've got the ideal spot and it overlooks the valley. Crikey, that went quick. So basically it's not just us but people who visit the area. I nearly ran over a dozen cyclists this morning. They come along Gooromon Ponds Road every day. You've got Gooromon Ponds and Southwell Road, a gateway to a beautiful shared area. That's why we called our property The Fells, it's based on a novel, A Shepherd's Life, about the shared valley and the amenity of the valley in the Lakes District in northeast England with the mountains in the background and the valley.

It's considered to be a shared resource and I believe that the approval of this solar farm, it's going to detract on the value of the properties, tourists, people in Canberra, it's going to affect theirs and also the crux of what I'm saying is that all of us as Australians, as citizens, society, how can we plan, work hard, make sacrifices and in doing so comply with all of Council regulations and provisions and yet still have the rug pulled out from under our feet? I think the approval of this project will be a backwards step for us achieving our renewable targets.

MR MILLS: Thank you, I'll have to stop you there. Thank you. And just a reminder, if there's any additional points that you or anyone else would like to make, you can always make them in writing and they'll be taken into consideration. Thank you. Do we have Rafe Champion back online? Thank you.

MR RAFE CHAMPION: Hello.

MR MILLS: Hello, Rafe. Please go ahead.

MR CHAMPION: Well, first of all, thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. I have to say it's not the greatest time, I'm still recovering from the State of Origin last night and it reminds me of a poem by Banjo Paterson, a game so hotly contested on the field that a spectator's leg was broken just from looking on.

Anyway, I've made a number of general points in a written submission and I'd like to just go broader to look at the context of this whole debate about renewable energy. I think it'd have to be conceded or at least from my point of view as a scientist, that there is really no worry about warming and there's no worry about CO2 as a driver of warming, such as it is. The warming since the live ages has been entirely beneficial and so has the CO2. The problem with CO2 is very often it's on the low side compared with geological history. It's only just above the level that's required to maintain life on Earth.

Add to that, Australia's contribution is something like 1% of the world's total and falling. Nothing we do will make a scrap of difference even if it did matter and I think it's time to really take stock of what's going on around the world. Coal use is increasing and that's because [unintelligible 00:42:26] for those countries that are using it. We're going to have to burn coal until nuclear [unintelligible 00:42:33] so I think the game is just about all over when you look at all the facts of the matter. So I'll just leave you with those thoughts and I'll go back and lie down. Thanks very much.

10 **MR MILLS:** Thank you. All right. So I think we're also going to go to the telephone again, Marijana Di Iulio. Are you there, Marijana? Hello, Marijana?

MS MARIJANA DI IULIO: Hello?

15 **MR MILLS:** Hi. Welcome to this public meeting. Please go ahead.

MS DI IULIO: Good morning, members of the Planning Commission. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning. I'm in strong opposition to the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm. Hello?

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MR MILLS: Yes, we can hear you.

MS DI IULIO: Good morning, members of the Planning Commission.

25 **DR BRONWYN EVANS:** Please go ahead.

MR MILLS: Please go ahead. We can hear you.

30 **MS DI IULIO:** Okay. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning. I'm in strong opposition to the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm. I'm a rural landholder situated adjacent to the proposed solar farm. The site will be accessed next to my property and all the construction traffic will be going past the front of my property.

35 I have concerns about the solar farm being situated in the proposed location so close to residents' homes and rural properties. The 5 km buffer along the Yass Valley ACT border to be maintained as productive rural land has been ignored. Several other issues are also of concern. The proposed construction phase of this solar farm reinforces the fact that it's not suitable for this location.

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Ninety vehicle movements a day including 32 heavy vehicle movements. The report recommends that the WSF will prepare and implement a traffic management plan, undertake an independent dilapidation survey to assess the road, repair or make good any development related damage. These assessments and recommendations look good on paper but the reality of the roads in mention are that they are rural roads. By introducing B-double heavy vehicles on our roads would simply not be safe.

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5 We have families who access this road daily. Young children wait on the side of the road at their gates to catch a school bus each day. The introduction of these trucks to our roads could have detrimental impacts. It is also very common to see large groups of cyclists on those roads. This traffic will be from 7 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday and 8 am to 1 pm Saturdays, the majority of the time when people are accessing the road. These hours are also very different to what was discussed at the planning meeting.

10 My concern is the health and safety of our local community and believe this has not been addressed. The fact that there will be 36 container size liquid cooled battery storage systems and a substation on the site is very concerning. Battery damage is a real possibility. This possible contamination would be detrimental to the land and residents. To my knowledge, the exact location of the batteries on the proposed solar farm are not documented. How close to property boundaries are they?

15 The assessment report states that the WSF will develop management plans to avoid contamination from battery storage. Initially I was told that contamination is not possible.

20 I have brought up the issue of noise at planning meetings. The report states that noise levels predicted to meet relevant criteria. It is not clear, what if the predicted level is higher? There are too many unknowns. I'm concerned for the health and safety of my family during the construction but also during the running of the proposed solar farm. Insurance premiums for neighbouring properties are a concern and this has not been addressed adequately in the report.

25 So in conclusion, this is not a case of not in my backyard. The solar farm does not belong in an agricultural area with residents and businesses. There is obvious community objection to this project, which reinforces the fact that it should not go ahead as there are far too many unknowns and negative impacts. Wallaroo was never meant to be the location of a solar farm, so please consider the history of the region and understand that this beautiful rural town cannot be turned into an industrial site. Thank you for listening.

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35 **MR MILLS:** Thank you, Marijana. Do the Commissioners have questions?

DR EVANS: No.

40 **MR MILLS:** I did note that there were a few things there for the Applicant to perhaps take on notice and consider whether or not they'll be able to respond to later today. Thank you.

45 **MS DI IULIO:** Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thanks very much, Marijana.

MS DI IULIO: Thank you.

MR MILLS: Our next speaker is in person, Marilyn Gendek.

5 **MS MARILYN GENDEK:** Slide 1. Thank you. Thank you, Commissioners, for the opportunity to speak today. Could I have slide 2, please, quickly afterwards. Thank you.

10 I have lived in the city of Canberra, the federal capital of Australia, for 30 years. My husband and I came to Dunlop in 2015. I've also lived in a rural community, having grown up on a dairy farm. I'm one of those lucky people who live within 1 k of the proposed project. It is clear residents of the City of Canberra, and I emphasise city, have been significantly snubbed, not sufficiently informed and denied buffer zones which only apply in New South Wales apparently, although Wallaroo doesn't seem to have them either.

15 Five kilometres from large towns and 10 kilometres from commercial centres. Of course in these areas and there's a little house, you can't see it on the map, sorry, but in the northwest of the area there is a little house and that's where I live. But just a k away from the border is the Charnwood and Kippax centres and in
20 Charnwood alone, it's tons of children. Two schools, childcare centres and various other services. The Belconnen town centre, which is the major hub, is less than 10 km from the solar project. Slide 3, please.

25 Now, think about that because the documentation for the project states that the site is bushfire prone. The project perspective is low fire risk because they will follow the requirements for managing fire. It also states that battery storage can elevate fire ignition risks. The red on this map, I'm sorry about the overlay, poor proof reading, the red on this map is classified as fire prone and that is without a solar farm on its fence line.

30 It is well known that when something happens to a lithium ion battery, it happens quickly and it's hard to stop. This is in direct conflict with the project information, which classes fire as low risk. And let's not forget the area has many water courses, which feed into the Murrumbidgee and these will be polluted as a result
35 of fire and firefighting.

40 In addition, the prevailing direction of the wind in this area is from the west. Think 2003, for those of you who were here at that time. An out of control New South Wales bushfire bearing down on Canberra. But this will be already over the fence, metres from home, if it's to happen in the project area.

45 Slide 4, please. This is my backyard. It is also where my husband spent a lot of time in the last year of his life. The road is Douglas Waterhouse Drive, a main road that services residents in my area. Now, imagine solar panels filling up space all along the middle third of the photo from right to left. Each photo I will show you from here is what we, the residents see, the real world of Dunlop. Not cleverly mastered maps from Google. Slide 5, please.

5 This is taken from Courtneidge Street, looking across the section of grasslands that runs to Kerrigan Street. Houses are behind me. Now, imagine panels running along the entire mid-section just above the houses. Slide 6, please. This is a close up of the same location. Slide 7, please. There's been much talk about glint and glare. It has been hugely underestimated from the scoping report of 2020 and onwards. I would call it dangerous, blinding glare because on my experience, with just one solar panel situated on a descending S-bend by the Shoalhaven River or driving or driving on [Owens Road? 00:51:57] was very dangerous indeed.

10 I live on an elevation. Douglas Waterhouse Drive starts at the same elevation at the beginning and drops down to a bend and looks across to where the solar panels would be erected. There are houses behind me and down DWD. According to a topographical map, the elevation is commensurate with sections of the planned site of solar panels. Could I have slide 9, please?

15 Okay. The perimeter plantings will not hide solar panels from the elevations, only if you live right in front of them. The view for houses, walking, driving, horse riding, enjoying the sunset over the hills and so on will be destroyed if the project goes ahead and we well know that property values will drop significantly. The current use of the area for enhancing mental health will have the opposite effect. Slide 9, please.

25 Finally, there is much more that is wrong with the project to erect 182,000 solar panels on the ACT border. Despite the static images we are fed there is inter alia potential for fire, blinding glare and increase heat and so on. And don't forget, more foxes and rabbits despite what is being told about what will be lovely underneath it.

30 But let's not forget noise that will never be blocked because of the landscape and elevations. The subject land is not a place for New South Wales to meet its lagging targets because buffers can be ignored. And lastly, the fact that the City of Canberra, city, the federal capital of Australia and its residents have been treated as invisible and irrelevant in relation to the project is actually reprehensible. Thank you.

35 **MR MILLS:** Another point or two for the Applicant for respond to, in particular the fire planning, glint and glare. Senator Gerard Rennick is the next speaker. He's on the phone, I believe. Senator?

40 **SENATOR GERARD RENNICK:** Yes, hi, guys. How you going?

MR MILLS: Good, thank you. Over to you.

45 **SENATOR RENNICK:** Hi. Yes, look, I'm happy to speak on behalf of people who are against this wind farm today. My feeling is that we don't actually need any more solar farms in this country. I just think that they don't have a long enough life and the recycling of the solar farms at the end of their life hasn't been properly scrutinised and the question is what will happen to these solar panels

once they come to their end of their life and what will happen to the farm and how will these solar panels be removed from the farm?

5 The other thing is I would also ask is what are the fire risks? I mean, it can get quite hot and dry down there on the border of New South Wales ACT border there throughout summer. Are these solar panels a threat in terms of fire? So has that been properly considered?

10 And finally, given that the solar panels are only going to work in the middle of the day, say between nine and three, is it really going to be economical to use these solar panels instead of base load energy such as nuclear power, gas or coal? And that's it from me.

15 **MR MILLS:** Thank you very much. I noticed that there was a recycling issue at the end of life and again the proponent may wish to take that and see whether they can answer that today. Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RENNICK: Okay, no worries.

20 **MR MILLS:** If there's nothing else – no questions?

DR EVANS: No.

25 **MR MILLS:** So John McGrath. Is he in the room?

30 **MR JOHN MCGRATH:** Look, thank you very much to the IPC, Wallaroo IPC, for having me speak. Speak on behalf of the Yass Landscape Guardians and we're against the Wallaroo Solar Farm SSD-9261283. What the IPC and the audience need to be aware of, taking over farm land, grazing land to build facilities to produce intermittent energy is a violation of Article 2, s 1(b) of the Paris Agreement 2015, signed by the Australian government.

35 Here I'll go to the proponent's joke about growing wool and grazing sheep, that's a circus. I'm sorry, it doesn't happen under solar panels, it doesn't happen. Okay, you've got a lack – all these things are being put into place, solar, wind, there's a lack of compulsory decommissioning for so called renewable sources yet unapproved [unintelligible 00:57:17]. These things have no end life. They're never going to be taken away.

40 Proliferation of so called renewable projects in the Yass district, at least 10, I had nine but I did a head count last night, erected, approved or planned is saturation point for the Yass Valley. No more. The other thing that often wind turbines are used to draw back power, there's over generation already. We don't need extra generation.

45 Pollution during manufacture. Transport, construction and installation. CO2 released at every stage. CO2's supposed to be a what's a name gas, a dangerous gas for global warming, so to speak. CO2, which is the primary carbon source for

all life on Earth. Contamination and destruction of the environment, the panels contaminate, when they break down they contaminate the environment with heavy metals and you'll never get the ground back again. Mining of heavy metals and implications of both slave labour and child labour within the supply chain for solar panels is to be considered, please.

Solar panels will catch on fire at a known ignition point. Wallaroo is situated west of Canberra, which means Canberra population is exposed to severe fire risk and atmospheric pollution. The whole of Canberra would need to be evacuated if this thing caught on fire. You can't control the fire in there.

Connection to the grid. Many of these projects are approved by the IPC or the Department, yet there's no capacity in the grid and I'll quote here, Bango Wind and Coppabella Wind, both approved the connection to lines, Bango to the 999, 1-32 and Coppabella to the 99 and M132. Neither had the capacity to take the power that was going to be generated.

Known devaluation of associated real estate. At Crookwell, around the wind turbines, the properties are devalued by at least 40%, so people need to be understanding that. And how long do solar panels last when you get a hail storm? Thank you very much.

MR MILLS: Thank you very much. We should have Grant Piper on the telephone as our next speaker. Grant, can you hear us?

MR GRANT PIPER: Yes, I'm here.

MR MILLS: Terrific. Thank you. Over to you.

MR PIPER: Okay, thank you. Hello.

DR EVANS: Go ahead, please.

MR PIPER: I'm sorry, is the previous speaker finished?

MR PEARSON: We can hear you.

MR MILLS: Yes, the previous speaker is finished. Please do go ahead.

MR PIPER: Apologies. Yes, there's a delay. All right. Thanks for hearing me today. Now, I'm speaking on behalf of the National Rational Energy Network. This new energy development, New Energy Development company and Univergy, a Spanish Japanese consortium and Wallaroo Solar Farm Pty Ltd could disappear any time, leaving decommissioning and clean-up costs to locals. That is the taxpayer.

It's a foreign owned company that doesn't have the good of local residents or the nation at heart. Univergy is here to take advantage of our generous subsidy scheme

and put profit overseas in a low tax jurisdiction. These facts are the basis for how the project should be viewed and assessed. Solar is grossly inefficient and only produces an average less than 20% of its install capacity.

5 The whole of life, including disposal [unintelligible 01:01:02] needs to be considered, not just the [unintelligible 01:01:05] emissions the previous speaker mentioned. With a short work life of 15–20 years [unintelligible 01:01:12] several times the life of a conventional thermal power station, incurring even more environmental and economic cost. Wallaroo states a 30 year life [unintelligible 10 01:01:23]. Battery storage [unintelligible 01:01:24] power at a high environmental cost due to the sunk energy and materials used in their manufacturer and their short work life. A short life means recurring removal and replacement environmental cost.

15 And uncontrollable battery fires are another [unintelligible 01:01:39]. This leads to the conclusion that solar is counterproductive [unintelligible 01:01:44] power. It causes more harm than it saves. Due to the distributive nature of solar [unintelligible 01:01:54] additional transmission lines needed to [unintelligible 01:01:55] cost which until now has been [unintelligible 01:01:58]. Wallaroo has 20 [unintelligible 01:02:00] connections to an existing line, so it's [unintelligible 01:02:06].

The fire risk due to solar is stated as low but [unintelligible 01:02:08] fire risk in the area is high, as a prior speaker mentioned and it's normal for [unintelligible 25 01:02:15]. Native flora screening with the proposed [unintelligible 01:02:18] also adds to the fuel load and native bushes and shrubs burn very well. And the project is west, nor'west [unintelligible 01:02:26] area of the ACT.

In the event of a lightning strike or other [unintelligible 01:02:30] RFS fire crews 30 are unable to enter [unintelligible 01:02:33] facility to fight the fire due to the restrictive [unintelligible 01:02:36]. On a bad fire day with a hot [unintelligible 01:02:41] this would allow the fire to [unintelligible 01:02:44] outside the project area, threatening urban areas just as happened in the [unintelligible 01:02:50] Canberra fire.

35 Consent conditions should include effective fire mitigation and firefighting actions. Suggested action would be a permanent [unintelligible 01:03:00] firefighting personnel accommodated on the site throughout the summer season. Future expansion of the project and the total impact on community, environment, 40 agricultural production and [unintelligible 01:03:11] must be considered and compared to alternative [unintelligible 01:03:13] power production [unintelligible 01:03:15] using the existing [unintelligible 01:03:17] network.

45 We cannot [unintelligible 01:03:19] government in regards to [unintelligible 01:03:21] when they remove, in inverted commas, [unintelligible 01:03:27] food production, finish in inverted commas, from the [unintelligible 01:03:29] 2023 [unintelligible 01:03:31] previous speaker mentioned, which is codified in the 2015 Paris Agreement since [unintelligible 01:03:41] does include provision to

protect food production.

[unintelligible 01:03:46] in regards to [unintelligible 01:03:51] development pathways. Those have been done by experts [unintelligible 01:03:57] in the field. The National Electricity Law [unintelligible 01:03:59] separately also does not prioritise emission reduction over the other longstanding objectives of [unintelligible 01:04:06] quality, safety and security. These objectives must be at least [unintelligible 01:04:09] when assessed [unintelligible 01:04:12] projects.

The National Electricity Law amendment added emissions targets objectives only in September 23 and even then [unintelligible 01:04:20] included, in inverted commas, likely to contribute to reducing emissions, end inverted commas.

So it sounds like the legal advice is confident that these projects would reduce – was not confident that these projects would reduce emissions, so they included a [unintelligible 01:04:34] out due to indemnity, when the current government policy is highly [unintelligible 01:04:38] counterproductive. Solar harvesting plantations such as Wallaroo project has no electrical engineering merit, economic justification or environmental benefits. It should not be approved. Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you very much, Mr Piper. Our next speaker is Mark Johnstone, who should be here in person. Thank you.

MR MARK JOHNSTONE: Thank you for giving me the opportunity [unintelligible 01:05:15]. I'm a local resident of Wallaroo, have been for 23 years now. I am a supporter of renewable energy but not of reckless renewables, as I believe this project is. I have solar panels on my roof, I have a battery at my residence. I think they're great ideas but this project is by no means to be supported.

What attracted me to the area, prior to living at Wallaroo, we lived at Charnwood for 13 years, overlooking the pristine countryside, right across where this proposed project is to go and we fell in love with those views and decided that we would work hard to eventually live out that way. It took us 20 years to do that and a lot of hard work and savings and we made it and now not a day goes by where we don't savour the views that we have and the outlook of this pristine countryside. It really is something special and unique.

I'm also the local real estate agent in the area. For the past 10 years, of all the properties that have listed for selling in Wallaroo, I would've dealt with more than 80% of those. So I have a very good handle on what it is that people are attracted to to live in that area and by no means it is certainly the local environment, the outlook, that countryside view and that is about to be taken away if this project goes ahead. I don't care what the developers say as far as screening it goes, you cannot possibly screen that many solar panels and it would definitely be a detriment to all those who live there.

It's not only Wallaroo that I sell property. I also sell property across the ACT,

across the west Belconnen suburbs, including Dunlop, MacGregor and Charnwood and Fraser and I know personally that they are going to be affected. And I know that they have chosen to live in those areas for their magnificent outlook that they do have.

5

I guess from my perspective, being a professional real estate agent, the main point I would like to make is that my estimation is that property values of the many hundreds of properties here are going to be impacted in a negative way and I would estimate that that would be in excess of 20% of their value. This is not right, this is not fair. These sort of projects, if they are going to go ahead, they need to be put in the right location. This is not the right location. It is reckless renewables.

10

15

So I'll keep it at that. I'd love to talk about many other things that others have raised already but I don't need to repeat all of that. So thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you. Our next speaker is by telephone. Just checking that Alan Moran is available. Alan Moran?

20

MR ALAN MORAN: Hello.

MR MILLS: Hello. You're speaking. You have the floor.

25

MR MORAN: I have the floor. Okay. Thank – you can hear me okay?

MR MILLS: We can. Very clearly.

30

MR MORAN: Okay, let me just say then, I want to concentrate essentially on the economics of this matter. The project is yet another that is commercial only because it has subsidies courtesy of the Australian government and to some degree state government. These include first the renewable energy target, the LRET, which the company acknowledges, and which provides a subsidy of \$47 per megawatt hour, which is over one third of the value of this energy.

35

The second is the transmission lines being built at consumer expense to collect and distribute the power from this under the diffused forms of power. And thirdly we have the need for backup power from gas, coal and hydro resources, without which this could not possibly attract any customers.

40

In this case, the company says it will have batteries, initially at 20 megawatt hours and perhaps eventually at 150 megawatt hours to complement its 100 megawatt solar facility. But even the most optimistic assumptions, given solar's capacity factor of 20%, it would require 500 megawatt hours of storage, not 150, certainly not 20 megawatt hours. In the light of losses and cloudy days and other factors, backup would need to be at least 10 times that. Many worldwide sources put the need for backup for solar at over 20 times the capacity, given the inevitably long periods of low solar strength and costs of charging and discharging batteries, et cetera.

45

Without customers being forced to provide subsidies, the \$170 million of spending could never be a viable investment. Worse than that, the spending is actually destructive. Subsidised solar forces commercial plant to operate inefficiently and unprofitably, leading to its closure. We've already seen a dozen of the 60 reliable and firm power delivering coal units in Australia being forced to close over the past decade, a decade during which renewable subsidies have bitten in and eaten into the market share of commercial providers.

Somewhat farcically [unintelligible 01:11:27] is dependent on subsidies, the company claims that renewable energy is the lowest cost type of new energy generation in Australia. The facts that are absent subsidies, solar is far and away the most costly form of electricity generation, rivalled only by onshore wind, as shown by many different calculations across the world.

I mean, the recent one is by Orr and Rolling, who use Minnesota data and by including load balancing, fuel cost, O and M, transmitting, as well as the capital cost, they put coal, this is in Australian dollar terms, at \$51 per megawatt hour, gas at \$40–137 per megawatt hour, depending on the source of the gas, nuclear at about 55. Wind comes in at \$405 per megawatt hour and solar at an eye watering \$704 per megawatt hour. Solar is therefore 10 times the cost of coal, nuclear and gas and by imposing it on the economy, these costs are incurred by consumers and industry.

Notwithstanding government support for all things green, fossil fuels, with uranium, have powered modern living standards and coal, oil and gas will power increased living standards for those countries where governments do not regulate them out of the market. Sadly, Australia, under present policies, can't be among these success stories.

So I would urge the panel to seek further information on and evidence of the costs the proposal estimate and rehear the case in the light of this. Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you. Our next speaker is also on the telephone, Ramila Chanisheff. Is Ramila available? Ramila, can you hear me?

MS RAMILA CHANISHEFF: Yes, I can.

MR MILLS: Terrific. Thank you. Over to you for your submission, thank you.

MS CHANISHEFF: Thank you very much. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ramila and I represent the Uyghur community here in Australia. I am going to here talk about the slave labour, forced Uyghur labour that is used to make, to mine and to supply the solar panels that come out of China.

Solar panels, the key component is mined in Xinjiang, what is known in Xinjiang, occupied East Turkestan by the Chinese Communist regime and they – you would've heard in the last few years that concentration camps have come up,

people have disappeared into the concentration camps and people have been forced into labour to not only mine the products that come from the solar panels but also to make them.

5 So we have lost family members into slave labour, forced labour and the products, any product that comes out from China is tainted by Uyghur forced labour. So products that – especially solar panel, electric vehicles that come to Australia in such cheap prices, we can guarantee 99.9% that it is used – they are using Uyghurs as forced labour and slave labour to make the products.

10 Now, I am pleading with you, especially in this day and age when the Australian government has introduced an Anti-slavery Commissioner, yet to be determined who it is but the fact that the person has come – the position has been announced and New South Wales also has an Anti-slavery Commissioner in place to ensure
15 that these products that are tainted by forced labour should not be entering Australia.

Besides the environment destruction that these solar panels do, it has severe repercussions of human lives as well. So as an Uyghur activist and as Uyghur
20 person, I am here to talk about Uyghur forced labour.

Now, America has a forced labour act in place. European Union is in the last stages of enforcing legislation and yet Australia, with the Anti-slavery
25 Commissioner and the federal Anti-slavery Commissioner in place, we still do not have strong enough legislation to ensure products do not enter this country that is made by tainted forced labour.

Now, I really hope that any solar panels that enter into New South Wales or anywhere in Australia is thought about, is researched in depth, talk to the
30 community, especially the Uyghur community as to where these products are coming from and how far can each of us and especially yourselves can ensure that the supply chain, the final products are not tainted by Uyghur forced labour. Thank you very much.

35 **MR MILLS:** Thank you, Ramila.

MR PEARSON: Can I just say, I think that's something that we'd like to hear from the Applicant on when they do their response.

40 **MR MILLS:** Yes, what are the slavery policies and –

MR PEARSON: Yes.

45 **MR MILLS:** – understanding of your supply chain. Thank you. Our next speaker is Adam Gresham. Is Adam here?

MR ADAM GRESHAM: Got me? Yes. Okay, first of all, I'd just like to say thanks for the opportunity of doing this. Second of all, definitely I'm not a person

that's opposed to renewable energy at all but am opposed to the location of this proposed site. I have concerns about the project, especially consultation and safety. I have concerns about the location for the battery storage system. If it becomes compromised or catches on fire, what the implications are to all surrounding residents.

I'm a firefighter of 20 years plus and although the likelihood of something occurring may be low, the consequences would be catastrophic. Due to airborne poisons and carcinogens that would be carried through smoke, if something major happened, there'd be big implications for the residents of the surrounding areas. There's a lot of unknowns with these storage systems, that is new technology and I suppose a question would be what research has been documented for this project to suggest that it's safe for the residents of the surrounding areas?

Regarding there's some sort of law about a 5 km abatement zone in terms of building or something like that. Correct me – you know, apologies if I've sort of got this interpretation wrong but I hope you know what I'm talking about. I'd just like to know why would this development have an exemption to these rules which would also set a precedent for future development? I mean, the rule's been made for a reason, so I think in fairness for everyone, they should be followed.

I would also like to know what consultation has ACT Planning and their environment section had in this project. I feel like the consultation process hasn't been thorough and consulted all impacted parties, in particularly our First Nations people and the residents in the Ginninderra electorate. I've also got questions over the construction phase, which severely impacts all residents of Wallaroo, which I'm a member of, as there's only one way in and out.

For the school run, there's 50 kids, 56 kids that get on and off the bus twice a day. You've just got to have a look at the roads that we've got there at the moment, they're a small typical country road. There's not much space on the side of the road for kids to stand there when traffic's going past and I think the impact of the 20 so called trucks coming in multiple times a day would have on their safety. That is a very big concern for me as I've got school age kids that use this.

Sorry, I'd taken notes, so –

MR MILLS: That's fine, take your time.

MR GRESHAM: Hopefully I've got a little bit left. The construction phase. I've got questions whether it's been sought out well enough. The proposed construction routes severely impact all the 156 families of Wallaroo. As I said, there's only one way in and one way out. We've got the school kids. A question for the panel, I suppose, is why hasn't a route via the industrial area of Parkwood been put up as a safer option? Obviously it's an industrial area, obviously roads have been created, especially for trucks coming in and out and it, in my opinion, would be a safer option. I think that's about it. Yes, okay, thank you.

DR EVANS: [unintelligible 01:22:36].

MR MILLS: Yes, yes, we will. We'll take that –

5 **MR PEARSON:** And it might be good for the Applicant to talk about that industrial route option that the speaker mentioned. Yes.

10 **MR MILLS:** As well as the engagement with the ACT Planning Departments and First Nations. Thanks. Okay. Our next speaker is Dennis Armstrong on the telephone. Is Dennis available? Are you there?

MR DENNIS ARMSTRONG: Yes, can you hear me?

15 **MR MILLS:** Okay. Yes, we can hear you clearly. Thank you very much. Over to you.

20 **MR ARMSTRONG:** Excellent. Good morning, panel. Thank you for the opportunity for Save Our Surroundings to address the Commission today. The Department has put a lot of effort into classifying the [unintelligible 01:23:29]. However, the justification [unintelligible 01:23:34] change from similar projects in [unintelligible 01:23:36]. This is despite the evidence available that contradicts many of the claims made by both the proponent and the Department.

25 95% [unintelligible 01:23:47] object to this [unintelligible 01:23:49] which is typical for most proposed [unintelligible 01:23:51]. [unintelligible 01:23:54] does not. In addition, the Department's assessment fails to address many significant issues by omission, such as the project's role in the network, emissions created, electricity cost, BESS issues, resource allocation and public interest. I'll address each of these separately.

30 Part of a network. This proposed project is not a standalone project like a shopping centre or a warehouse might be. The Wallaroo works would become part of existing national electricity [unintelligible 01:24:30]. The reason for transition –

35 **MR MILLS:** Excuse me, Dennis. Dennis, can I interrupt you just for a second? We're having a bit of trouble with the sound quality here at the moment. I'm just going to check what we can do for you.

40 **MR ARMSTRONG:** Okay.

MR MILLS: Perhaps if you slow down a little and I don't know whether you're moving your head up and down, the signal seems to be clear from our end.

45 **MR ARMSTRONG:** Okay. We'll see if we can go a bit better. Okay. So do you want me to repeat anything that I've said so far?

MR MILLS: Yes, look, if you don't mind just going back over the last couple of sentences that you gave us.

MR ARMSTRONG: Okay.

MR MILLS: Thank you.

5

MR ARMSTRONG: I said, in addition, the Department's assessment fails to address many significant issues by omission such as the project's role in the network, emissions created, electricity costs, BESS issues, resource allocation and public interest. I'll address each of these separately now.

10

Part of the network. This proposed project is not a standalone project like a shopping centre or a warehouse might be. The Wallaroo works would become part of the transitioning national electricity market grid. The reason for transitioning the grid is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, the contribution and claims made for the project must be evaluated against similar and other alternatives.

15

By not evaluating this project against other renewables projects, we do not get to understand why the basic parameters for each project can be so different. They all have to produce the same standard product of alternating current electricity. For example, why do lifetimes vary from 20 to 50 years for similar PV solar works? Why do capacity factors vary so widely, even when located in a similar geographic area? Why recommend both projects when there could be a 30% difference in the electricity produced over time? Why do some projects have a BESS and others do not? Which is the most viable in the long term?

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Now, I'll look at the emissions ignored. SOS have previously demonstrated to the Commission that the PV solar panels manufactured in China take 8.6 to 14.3 years to offset the embedded emissions, even before the panels leave the factory and have the frames fitted. By extension, all the other emissions created to bring the project to operating stage and its integration into the network cannot be offset during the 20 year economic life of the project. That was as stated in p 42 of the assessment.

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35

We ask for consistency to be applied. Just as the Commission cited that coal exported and burnt overseas was detrimental to the environment, we think the upfront creation of emissions be a consideration for this and similar projects, especially as emissions reduction is the main justification for the project.

40

Next topic. Cheaper electricity costs to consumers have never occurred. The only other justification for the project is that the cheaper electricity cost to consumers will result. All available evidence, both in Australia and overseas shows that the more unreliable renewables in the network and the higher the cost of the electricity to consumers. Lower costs have never been realised to date anywhere.

45

In Australia, our electricity costs over the last 15 years have risen twice as fast as inflation. This coincides with a growing percentage of wind and solar capacity in the NEM, which is now above 35%.

Next topic. Battery energy storage system or BESS. Little attention is given to the batteries component of this project, the short useful lives, the significant embedded emissions, the serious risks of uncontrollable fires, release of toxic smoke and the recycling difficulties and their costs are ignored. The assumption of BESS batteries will be charged from excess renewable electricity generation and then provide electricity during high demand and at other times defies reality.

For example, and this is just one of many examples we could produce, South Australia currently has renewables generating capacity of over 60% and Australia's biggest battery storage. On 4 June this year, during the peak demand period between 6 and 9 pm, the batteries started at 6% but were quickly flattened. By 9 pm of the high demand period and until the next morning, power came from 97% gas fired plants and 3% diesel generators. Zero wind, zero batteries and zero solar generation.

By the way, the whole NEM in this example had zero solar generation, zero electricity from batteries and only 1% from wind generation. Power came from coal, gas, diesel and hydroelectric generation. Several wind and sun droughts have occurred this year already, so running down gas reserves, requiring frequent shutdown of high energy users and further increasing wholesale electricity costs. Clearly claims of reliable, cheap and emissions free electricity generation by wind and solar BESS backup are a fallacy. Electricity costs have increased by 20–25% in the last year alone, despite increased renewables in the network.

Next topic, misallocation of resources. The Department highlights the claimed financial benefits to the local communities and the state of New South Wales. However, it omits any reference to the subsidies and benefits the Wallaroo project would receive. The growing billions of dollars of subsidies each year for wind, solar and BESS projects means that less money is available for services such as health, education and EIS, rural fire services, roads, social housing, defence, et cetera.

Ever increasing state and federal debts and interest payments are leaving a legacy for our children and their children to pay down. The net financial benefit favours the overseas developer and investors by a large margin over the negative impacts on the Australian population.

In addition, the ever increasing billions in cost blowouts of infrastructure projects that are only necessary because of the proliferation of unreliable wind and solar generation works add to the misallocation of resources. Snowy 2.0, the Marinus Link and the New South Wales Victorian Interconnector are but just three examples of wasted billions with no end in sight.

SOS has previously highlighted to the Commission that for each megawatt hour of electricity generated, the weight of material just for the PV panels and their steel supports use 3.8 times more materials than a megawatt from fully operating HELE coal plant in Queensland. This is unsustainable use of the Earth's resources.

In the public interest. The final statement in the executive summary of the assessment report states the Department states, “The Department considers that the project would result in benefits to the state and the local community and is therefore in the public interest and approval.” In what way is the public interest served when no measurable impact on global temperatures can be attributed to this project? The net benefits of the project and the full impact on the electricity network are not considered, which in our opinion are a negative cost to the network and the economy and results in ever increasing electricity costs.

Higher electricity costs are shown to be a significant contributor to our current inflation and hence interest rate increases. Hundreds of thousands of households are already struggling to pay the ever increasing energy bills. Tens of thousands of businesses are closing at an increasing rate, such as cafés, small businesses, that cannot recover the increases in their electricity costs. The AEMO and others have raised concerns of widespread blackouts as soon as next summer or even next month.

The New South Wales government is now paying hundreds of millions of dollars to keep the Eraring coal fired power station operating as renewables fail to live up to the hype. Intergenerational equity is ignored so that future generations of Australians will be paying off the forecast trillions of dollars that the energy transition is forecast to cost then. The misallocation of resources directly impact the quality of life as fewer funds are available. The 95% of submissions on the impact of community overwhelmingly do not want the project and so there is no social licence for this project.

In conclusion, this project has many serious flaws, some of which SOS has covered today. Some flaws are supposedly mitigated against but are not eliminated. Others, such as those raised today, are just ignored. We ask the Commission to object this project due to the multitude of reasons raised here and by others. Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you for that. Our next speaker is in person, Louis Sartor.

MR LOUIS SARTOR: To the panel, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Louis Sartor. I’m a second generation citrus farmer from Griffith in southern New South Wales, about 350 km southwest from here. Our family has grown citrus for 66 years.

Griffith’s a pretty dynamic area. It’s actually – while a lot of people claim that it’s the food hub – that their little area is the food hub of the world or of Australia, Griffith is the food hub of Australia. It’s an extremely vibrant small city of about 30,000 people. It’s located within the Murrumbidgee irrigation area in the Riverina. The Riverina has about 550,000 people.

We have a privately funded hospital by the community, we have a new \$450 million hospital being built and we have received about \$750 million worth of irrigation infrastructure upgrades, mainly funded by the Commonwealth for

water buy backs for the Murrumbidgee and the Murray River environmental flows, of which about 300,000 megalitres or 300,000 million litres of water is going back to the environment.

5 It is an agricultural powerhouse. We have Baiada producing 2.8 million processed
chooks a week. We have Australia's biggest winery with Casella, 170 million
bottles of wine a year. Nudie fruit juices, go to the fridge and pick up something
that tastes great, comes out of our area. 90% of all citrus from New South Wales is
10 produced in our area. We have massive, massive corporate, international and local
corporate investment in our area with walnuts, citrus, almonds. We have the water,
we have the soil, we can grow it.

Griffith is known internationally for its good soils and its reliable and safe water
access. As a citrus grower, our family farms export citrus. We have a very, very
15 strong presence in the Japanese, the US, New Zealand, Chinese, Indian, Canadian,
many Southeast Asian country markets. They love our sweet tasting oranges. Last
year's export nationally for citrus alone was \$534 million.

Obtaining access into export markets is never easy. Stringent on farm management
and food safety regulations and audits occur regularly to ensure that we maintain
20 our registration to be able to export fruit. We have a terrific reputation and I know
it's cliché, but it's clean and green and it certainly helps with market export.

As we grow new markets, changes in our food safety auditing occurs to support
25 our market access. Our minimum residue levels, they constantly test absolutely
everything we do on a farm, are being reviewed and reduced. Some countries are
talking about carbon calculators and food miles, while others are concerned about
water quality and the assessment and the usage of on farm water and what the
quality is like. And here, folks, lies the threat from the Wallaroo Solar Farm. A
30 threat I believe agricultural agriculture within the Murrumbidgee irrigation area
and the Murrumbidgee Valley cannot live with.

NGH in 2020 did a scoping study that showed that two significant waterways
within the proposed site of the Wallaroo Solar Farm, Gooromon Ponds, a grade 5
35 stream and Ginninderra Creek, a grade 6 stream, meaning both capture significant
water from larger catchments of other streams. Both streams are unregulated.
Unregulated means there's no way of being able to stop the flow of those streams
downstream. They reach the Upper Murrumbidgee.

40 Upper Murrumbidgee is unregulated. Flows all the way into Burrinjuck Dam.
Meaning that if there is a breach at the solar farm and there is contamination, it
does not stop until it reaches Burrinjuck Dam. Burrinjuck Dam is one of two
major water resources that feed the Murrumbidgee Valley, provides 1 million
45 megalitres of water into our valley. And that 1 million megalitres of water is used
for town, stock and domestic and irrigation as well as the 300,000 megalitres of
water that we send down to the environment.

Any breach or contamination from the proposed solar farm will poison a major

water storage.

MR MILLS: Finish but if you could just make your last couple of points.

5 **MR SARTOR:** Last couple of points. Just bear in mind I've travelled seven hours to be here.

MR MILLS: I appreciate that you have travelled a long way.

10 **MR SARTOR:** All of a sudden areas like Griffith all of a sudden become our backyard, not just the NIMBYs of "Oh, it's only a few people in a very select area." So the size of the backyard has been understated. Had I said to the good folk of Wallaroo 10 years ago that they'd potentially have an industrial size solar farm within their midst, they would've said that I was crazy, I was stupid, I was
15 ignorant, ridiculous, ludicrous and farfetched and that this was an impossibility. The scenario of containing one of this country's major water resources is probably going to be received with exactly the same words. I hope this doesn't occur. Thank you for listening.

20 **MR MILLS:** I think we'd like to hear from the Applicant in relation to some of the matters that have just been raised, particularly around impacts on waterways and so on and how that might be managed. Our next speaker is Katey Battenally, who should be on phone and I do believe Katey is available. Katey, can you hear us?

25 **MS KATEY BATTENALLY:** Hi, yes, I can. How you going?

MR MILLS: Well, thank you. Over to you.

30 **MS BATTENALLY:** Perfect. Thank you so much for having me. So my name's Katey Battenally. I'm currently living in Belconnen but I grew up in Wallaroo and my parents and brother still live there. My husband and I and our two kids live on reserve in Hawker in Belconnen, overlooking bushland. My appreciation for where we are now is based on where I grew up in gorgeous Wallaroo.

35 My brother and I were very lucky to have had the opportunity to live in Wallaroo growing up, after decades of my parents' hard work to build their place and establish their gardens from complete scratch and even luckier to be able to visit regularly. They live for the land they own and live off the land as much as
40 possible.

45 They support renewable energy on their property and in my opinion have done all the right things for their environment in setting up their property properly over the past 20 plus years, right down to what types of vegetations they planted and where and what most benefits the wind and harsh weather from the west to protect their aspect and the aspect of their neighbours and most importantly to protect all wildlife and domestic animal life they accommodate on their block.

5 I believe this is a common mutual understanding of all Wallaroo residents when building anything on any of their properties, which is why this proposed solar farm has most of the community up in arms about it. It doesn't gel well and is not seemingly aligned with the local and surrounding suburbs and the City of Canberra's approach to developments of any kind.

10 Now, the solar farm proposal, from mine and I'm sure shared points of view is jurisdiction contradiction. With the proposed solar farm, I worry that purely just the fact that the location is inconsistent with the Yass Valley settlement strategy and locating a development within the 5 km buffer area undermines the intended objectives to protect the open rural landscape and environmental values in the area, as many community members have already addressed today.

15 The potential jurisdictional loophole that allows something like this to be only 800 metres from the ACT residents of Dunlop, MacGregor, Charnwood and Fraser seems unfair for them. I don't understand how it's fair to be this close to be a residential area in the ACT.

20 With the proposed location being inconsistent with the current rule of zoning due to the potential for contamination being released into agricultural and residential areas and drinking water [unintelligible 01:43:18] should a battery fire ignite, it seems to be the wrong location and a jurisdiction contradiction, as I said earlier.

25 Wallaroo and property owners in general, it's all about location, location, location. Home owners and residents of neighbouring ACT suburbs would more than likely say the same thing. So yes, can we change the location? Thank you for allowing me to speak.

30 **MR MILLS:** Thank you very much, Katey. We're running slightly ahead of time, which is a testament to the respect I think that everyone's paid to each other in ensuring that they've kept to their times. So we do appreciate that. We might just simply take a five minute break and see whether or not it's possible to bring others forward who might not yet be – in particular, I'm concerned about others who may not yet be here or be ready. So if we just take five minutes and resume at 11.35.
35 Thank you.

SHORT BREAK

40 **MR MILLS:** Thank you all very much for reconvening. We have as our next speaker in person, Derek Whitcombe.

45 **MR DEREK WHITCOMBE:** Thank you, Chairman and colleagues for this opportunity. Yes, my name is Derek Whitcombe and I live in Wallaroo, over the hill about a kilometre or so from the proposed solar farm, as the crow flies. I bought the land and built our family home in 1992, 32 years ago and we've been there ever since.

My five children grew up on the property, catching the school bus on Southwell

Road to where the proposed solar farm would be. Riding horses all over the place and forging long friendships with the neighbours and the community and enjoying all the benefits of a wonderful country life in what we believe to be the most beautiful place on Earth.

5

Coincidentally, I'm a licensed real estate and stock and station agent in my 46th consecutive year in the industry, working in Canberra and surrounding districts. In my 46 years I've sold and managed the sale of approximately 9,000 properties in the region and Canberra.

10

Like many others here today, I have invested a large sum of money in developing my property. There's a wedding marquee on the place and a small local helicopter business operates rent free from it, taking people from the wineries on scenic flights around Wallaroo. There's no doubt in my mind that this business will close if the solar farm goes ahead. There's not much money in general aviation, I'm afraid, and who wants to pay money to fly over 750 football fields of black solar panels.

15

I declare that my objection is partially fuelled by self-interest as a Wallaroo property owner because I believe the local property values will be decimated and fall by at least 20–25% if this goes ahead.

20

My colleague, Mr Johnstone, also an expert in the area, has already attested to this, so I won't repeat his words. Some of these properties in the area are substantial but not all. Most are small rural abodes occupied by average people who work in Canberra or the local village of Hall. My daughter owns the cake shop in Hall, which caters to the many tourists that come out to enjoy the views, the wineries and the restaurants of the hills of Hall as part of Wallaroo is known.

25

Again, I have no doubt her business will suffer and close as well and she and her helpers will be unemployed. There are many other businesses in Hall that will be severely impacted by this solar farm if it goes ahead, for similar reasons.

30

But the biggest carnage to real estate values will occur in the suburbs of Dunlop, Charnwood, MacGregor and Flynn. These suburbs are mainly occupied by average people with mortgages and who bought there in many cases because of the peaceful rural vistas of the Wallaroo countryside. Many of these homes are only 2 km from the solar farm site. This area is a sort of spoon shape, which means that they look down, across and up to the proposed site. No amount of vegetation can be tall enough to block out the view of the solar panels.

35

40

I believe that the real estate value of these properties will drop by at least 20%. In some cases these owners have mortgages of 80–90% on their properties valued at say \$750,000. Many of these owners are struggling to survive due to the high costs of living that we're all experiencing at the moment. If they owe 80% to the bank and their property value drops by 20%, which would be \$150,000, their mortgage will be the whole value of the property or even worse.

45

5 There will be tens of millions of dollars wiped off the value of homes in these suburbs. My advice to these people will be to sell up now before the solar farm is confirmed and constructed. How the local politicians in Canberra have allowed this proposal to get this far without action is beyond me and I do recognise Peter Cain here today. How the head of tourism in Canberra and the surrounds was not even aware of it until I spoke with him last week is also beyond me. How the media has erstwhile missed the enormous scale and devastating consequences of this project is a mystery to me. Thank you.

10 **MR MILLS:** Thank you for that. I believe we have Lachlan Butler by phone, next. Lachlan, can you hear us?

MR LACHLAN BUTLER: Hello, yes, I can.

15 **MR MILLS:** Thank you. Please go ahead.

MR BUTLER: Hello. My name is Lachlan. I live in Dunlop, so relatively close to the proposed development. And I've registered to speak today, just because I have a few concerns about the project, its location, and how they've gone about it.

20 Limited – there's been very limited consultation on our side of the border. I could only recall getting one letter about the proposed development, and this was about 10 days before submissions closed. There was an expectation to go through hundreds of pages of documents. I went along to the information session at the hall, and I'm not overly confident, and don't have a lot of faith in what's been put forward.

25
30 It's challenging to have a lot of confidence that what they say to remediate the issues raised, will actually come through. You can see it through the way that the ACT border, ACT residents aren't really considered when it comes to this project. The proposed funding – sorry, the proposed community enhancement fund includes the Yass Valley Council, but doesn't really include ACT in any meaningful sense. So even though there's people living only 100 metres south of the project, are we going to get our fair share of even the small community funds put forward?

35
40 And when I went along to the information session, it was interesting witnessing an argument between some local landowners in Wallaroo, with some of the, someone that said that they were the owner of the land that the project's going on. And some of the locals were like, "Oh, our views are impacted. We moved out here, this isn't what we expected." And the response, if I recall correctly, was, "Yeah, my views are ruined, too. My house is closest to the project." And, yeah, I guess, fundamentally, I'm not very satisfied or convinced that what will – that how they're going to address the negative impacts will actually come through in any meaningful sense.

45 And at the end of the day, from my understanding, if the thousands of ACT residents, and the urban area of the ACT, Dunlop, Charnwood, McGregor,

Ginninderra were in New South Wales, it's New South Wales residents instead of a ACT residents, this project probably wouldn't happen, just because it's so close to such an urban area.

5 So in general, I think the overall conditions that have been put forward aren't enough to address the concerns that have been raised, and the concerns with changing quite meaningfully the nature of what's going to be happening out in that land there. And a lot more needs to happen before it would suit the area, if at all.

10 That's all I've got to say. I just wanted to make sure, I just wanted to highlight some of those key concerns. And yeah, very much wanted to just put forward the fact that when we talk about issues like the Canberra to Sydney railway, different governments make it very challenging. I think people can generally understand that. But it's hard to understand how a line on a map changes what development
15 would happen on the New South Wales border. I think it's much more reasonable to include a ACT residents, or consider the impact of ACT residents implicitly as New South Wales residents, when considering this sort project, these sort of projects. So happy to conclude there.

20 **MR MILLS:** I won't put you on the spot now, but you did make mention of the conditions not being adequate. But if there are things that you would like to write to us about in terms of conditions that might make a difference, we would welcome that. So thank you.

25 **MR BUTLER:** Excellent. Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you. Our next speaker is Ben Faulks, here in person. Thank you, Ben.

30 **MR BEN FAULKS:** Thank you. I don't want to overstate my role over the last few weeks, but I've been heavily involved in making sure that the residents of both communities are informed and aware of this deadline. And to me, that speaks to what has been the incredibly poor consultation around this project.

35 So I've written to Ministers in the ACT, who have advised that they did not have knowledge of this meeting. Lachlan, who just spoke, is actually the Chair of the Belconnen Community Council. I rang him in his capacity as the Chair of that body, did not realise he's a Dunlop resident, and he was not aware of this meeting.
40 He put me in touch with Marilyn Gendek, who made a beautiful presentation before – thank you, Marilyn – who also was not aware of this meeting.

I've spoken to Tourism New South Wales and Destination ACT; they were not aware of this meeting. And I've also spoken to a number of our local residents who are unable to be here, firstly, because it's a Thursday at 10:00am. Secondly,
45 we're in the middle of school holidays, and they are travelling. And thirdly, because we had a week's notice. So the consultation around this process to engage with this project, I would argue, has been poor.

5 We have solar panels in our roof. I'm not against renewable energy. I am very frustrated by the fact that we have purchased a home of significant value based on the beautiful scenery that we enjoy, and that this project proposes to transfer the wealth that we have invested in that project to one or two landowners and an offshore company. This is a transfer of wealth from a number of residents to one or two other parties.

10 To be honest, I can't understand why we are here. This is a jurisdictional loophole. There is no way that this project exists in any other setting in New South Wales, probably the country, because we have an artificial boundary. I'm way off my slides here, sorry. An artificial boundary that is being taken advantage of.

15 Part of the consultation I want to draw attention to is the report that was provided. There are some grabs here you won't be able to see taken from the visual impact assessment report, and there are just some inaccurate facts in this report. Specifically, and the one that is just glaring, is the photo on the top left hand side there is meant to show Wallaroo. It is a suburban house in a suburban setting. That location does not exist in Wallaroo.

20 There are a number of inaccuracies there, saying that there's significant transport corridors. This has been discussed, that Wallaroo is a cul de sac. It is one way in, one way out. These are single lane rural roads, already subject to significant potholes; those of us who live there will attest to that. And thank you to the Hodsons for filling them in on their own bat. So I do have significant concerns regarding the validity of the report, noting that that will be – carries significant weight with how the project has been reviewed to date.

30 I also have concerns about the conflict of interest in the generation of the reports. Because it is my understanding, and I'm willing to be corrected, that the report is prepared by a consultant on behalf of the developer. I also would like to clarify whether or not the local landscape company that was claimed, what 'local' means. Because if you look at the front page of the report, it is not a Wallaroo or ACT address.

35 The one other thing, and I'm going to just skip to the next slide, please – I am going to risk running over time, I'll try my best to contain it – is the comment in the report that views are generally contained. I totally reject this claim. It is impossible for me to capture the views from our property in a still image. The only way you will know and understand is to come to the property. I would love for you to come to my property on the way home after this. You'll be very welcome. We'll need a cup of tea because it's freezing cold. But you will get a general sense of what we are also frustrated by.

45 What I've tried to capture here is the elevation from the road back to my property, and then an image provided by Ben of what our view will become. Note that we are marked as 'not having a visual impact' in that report.

Next slide, please. I mentioned in our last slide, our property is called Bimbadeen.

5 It was once a winery. It was destroyed by a fire long before we purchased it. The fire started in the northwest corner of the property, and the prevailing winds carried it through, and if not for some very determined local firefighters, would have taken out the house that we live in, the Gooromon Ponds Riding Centre, and our neighbours. The north west prevailing winds here, for those of us who live with them, are significant. But the word 'Bimbadeen' is an Aboriginal word which means 'good view.' It means good view. This is part of the fabric of this community, and location, is the good view. It is a place of scenic beauty. Thank you for bearing with me as I try to finish up quickly.

10 People have made comment regarding the proximity to the town centres, and I won't dwell on that any further. I'd like the next slide please. I note that you'll be able to take these points as they're written and presented, so I won't need to address every single one of them. I do want to say a couple of final things.

15 I have a young family, like many of the people here. We have had to explain multiple times over the past two weeks why Dad's on the phone all the time, because of a solar farm. "What's a solar farm? Why is it going in across the road from our property? What is it, Dad? Why are they taking away the sheep and the cows?" That sounds emotive, because it kind of is. Like these are hard conversations to have, and I think they go to a point which hasn't been clearly addressed at any stage, by anyone, which is the mental health aspects of this on residents of wallaroo, on residents of Dunlop and Belconnen, who have not been consulted.

25 I'll speak for myself. This has caused a lot of sleepless nights and a lot of stress. We spent a significant amount of money, I'm happy to share with you off the back of this the value of our property, and to know that we're probably going to be tearing up over half a million dollars if this proceeds is pretty soul destroying.

30 I invite the Commission, as you no doubt will already be aware, to consider the case which I've put on the screen from Mudgee. In Mudgee, the Commissioner, Senior Commissioner, declared that scenic beauty and rural locations is a real thing. It is not something that is a NIMBY; not in my backyard. This is a place of significant beauty.

40 The other factor in that case was the lack of consultation. I'll allow you to explore that yourself. Insurance premiums has been breached. But my final point I'd like to say is this is as much a moral, a question of moral judgement, as much as any planning consideration or loophole jurisdictionally. This is a transfer of wealth. I want to say that again; this is a transfer of wealth. They are taking half a million dollars out of my pocket, and proposing to put it into Ben Cranston and his fellow organisations in the solar community. And I have not agreed to that. I believe it is my human right that I am entitled to enjoy the property for the purpose of which it was purchased. Thank you.

45 **MR MILLS:** Thank you very much for that, Ben.

5 **MR PEARSON:** Can I just say, Andrew, I think, because the Department of Planning is monitoring this public meeting, and they'll be talking later. They'll be talking later. So I think it would be good if they can respond to that specific point about what if, what if Canberra was in New South Wales, that issue of urban proximity. I think it would be good just to consider it in those terms, and they can talk to it later.

10 I think there's a few issues with this mic, Stuart, but yeah, OK, all good. Thank you.

MR MILLS: So our next speaker is Bernard O'Brien, yeah.

15 **MR BERNARD O'BRIEN:** Look, my concern with this is, yeah, I'll go along with what everyone said before, but is the safety aspect of it. I live on the Gooromon Ponds Road, which I bought the property there somewhere around about '60, '70. I'm the original owner of the property.

20 The road is a big concern, because it's only three metres wide. It used to be a dirt road, and then they threw a bit of tar on it and everything. Now they want to put some trucks down it, which do not apply to normal road things. Like the road should be at least three and a half metres wide, I would say. It's going to break the road up, which the traffic is doing now, because the road has not been properly constructed for this type of thing.

25 Also, I'd like to say that the bridge I originally tendered to build, right, there was some things I discussed with the Yarralumla Shire, which is back probably in the '85, '87 I think it was. I don't think now – that bridge was built then, and traffic you get today, like it wasn't put there for the trucks and that we've got today, the weight and that to travel over it.

30 I take it, it was, as far as I can remember, it has two or three sections in it, like it got put in in two and three sections. With these trucks coming down along that road, probably 70, 80 ton, at 80 kilometres an hour, maybe we may have some trouble with that bridge. Because before the bridge was there, and we get a bit of rain and that, you couldn't get out of the place for two days. So if anything happens to the bridge, no one will be leaving the area for a couple of days. That is a safety aspect of it, as I see it.

40 That's about most of the things I can say about it, but I also think on the environment side of it, since the ACT has been using up all the land, and sending all them animals over there, them kangaroos I'm talking about, this area where they're going to put this solar panel, is probably got many hundreds of kangaroos eating the grass there. So what's going to happen to that? That's got to be looked into, because we don't want them over there on our properties, coming in for cups of tea and things like that. Because they're right at my doorstep, just at present.

45 And when I first went there, you would not find a kangaroo in the area.

That's about all I've got to say anyhow. Thanks.

MR MILLS: Thank you very much. Bernard. Mr Peter Cain, the Liberal Member for Ginninderra in the ACT – Ginninderra? – has offered to speak to us today.

5 **MR PETER CAIN:** Well, good morning everyone. And look, I do want to thank the Commission for allowing me this opportunity, not being part of the formal program. It's interesting what happens when you just turn up. So thank you for that opportunity. Look, I'm the Member for Ginninderra, which is an ACT
10 electorate, and I'm also Shadow Minister for Planning and Land Management in the ACT.

So my involvement with this project, has included lobbying from the residents of West Belconnen, particularly Dunlop, and listening to their concerns, very, very
15 valid concerns about the visual impact of this development, and also hence the impact on the valuations of their land. So I wrote to the Chief Minister on behalf of the residents late last year. I have yet to receive a response.

I do want to thank actually New Energy Development, because I've had briefings with them myself to get an update on the development and where it's at. But
20 obviously, as a local Member, it's pretty obvious that this development will visually impact the residents in West Belconnen, and that's of concern to me. It's clearly of concern to them, as the Commissioners heard this morning.

Look, one thing I'd like the Commission to consider, and it's already really very
25 aware of this issue, as has been aptly called the jurisdiction contradiction. I might call it the policy consistency argument. If it's good enough for residents of New South Wales to have a significant buffer, then it should be good enough for the residents of the ACT to have at least the same buffer.

30 And as the national capital of this wonderful country, I think I would encourage the Commissioner, the Commission, to consider the standing of the ACT in that capacity, and obviously the impact. If these were New South Wales residents, I think the answer of the Commission would be fairly obvious. So why should it be
35 different for residents of the ACT who are right on the border with New South Wales?

So look, I do appreciate, again, the opportunity to speak to you. And again, you've heard from the Chair of the Belconnen Community Council as a resident as well. And I know there was a presentation from New Energy to the Belconnen Council.
40 But again, the impact on the residents is something that I do trust this Commission will consider significantly. And imagine if you yourself were living in that area, how would you feel about this development?

As a spokesperson, to a degree, in the planning space for the Canberra Liberals,
45 this is a solar development. It's something that we support. But obviously any worthy development has to weigh up the impact on local residents, particularly a settled and dense residential area.

Obviously, I'm here for a little while, just a little bit longer. If you want to come and speak to me, get my contact details, I'm not hard to find; cain@parliament.act.gov.au, please reach out if you've got concerns. I'm also happy to hear from New South Wales residents if there's some sort of value-add I can provide there as well.

But I do want to thank the Commission for this impromptu agenda item, and wish you all the best in your deliberations. Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you, Peter. We're going to take our lunch break now, and resume at 12:50, 10 to one. Thank you.

LUNCH

MR MILLS: Well, thank you, everyone, and welcome back to this public hearing into the Wallaroo Solar Farm. Our first speaker is Amanda Clark.

MS AMANDA CLARK: Sorry, I'll move it down. I'm only short. Please disregard the black eye; a hazard of working with animals. My name's Amanda Clark. I was 14 when we moved to Wirrabara, and then moved across the road to 214 Gooromon Ponds Road, which is now the Gooromon Park Riding Centre. I've lived in the area for 32 years, and the Riding Centre's been in operation for 25 years. We have 14 employees, with between 280 to 300 clients a week. We are home to 20 riding school horses, eight performance horses competing at Australian national level, and eight full time agistment holders horses.

At the time when the business was approved, the Yass Council made us pay a one-time fee to allow us to have increased traffic flow on the Gooromon Ponds Road. The Gooromon Park Riding Centre has received Local Business Awards, Australian Small Business Awards. We partner with Equestrian Australia and the Australian horse riding centres, and the local ACT Dressage Association, as well as Pegasus Riding for Disabled. We are highly regarded in the horse industry, and over the years, have produced great horse riders, who have even represented Australia. Personally, I believe we are one of the best riding centres in Australia. It's a personal opinion.

We operate Saturdays, 8:00am to 5:00pm; Monday and Wednesday, 4:00pm to 8:00pm; Tuesday and Thursday now 1:00pm to 8:00pm. As I mentioned recently, we started collaborating with Pegasus Riding for the Disabled, to transition their high functioning autistic students to our centre. The Head of Riding for Disabled came out, vetted the centre, and was happy that it was a quiet space and a safe environment for the horses and students, and that we were going to be operating during quieter times, which was 1:00pm to 4:00pm, during school hours, as many of the autistic students use their equine therapy as part of their general therapy plans.

As a business, we're concerned about the negative impacts to our business and clients, one being noise pollution. Solar farm construction and maintenance can

5 generate noise, potentially disrupting our business. Many autistic children experience sensory processing difficulties, which can make loud and unexpected noises overwhelming for them to cope with. Our clients enjoy a quiet, relaxing atmosphere, and an amazing view up the back of the property, looking back to Canberra.

10 The disruption to our clients, employees and residents whilst the road will be used will be significant, and could lead to a potential loss of income by our clients deciding it's easier to head to other riding schools without these disruptions. There's also a potential for liability, as horses are flight animals. The noise and disruption to their peaceful environment can increase our risk of falls, and therefore potential liability to our business.

15 This year, we've been diverted to Goulburn to get an ambulance to our property; that is over 150 kilometres away. As we did not reside in the ACT, emergency services would not come to us, and we had to advise clients to drive themselves to the closest ACT hospital when we had a fall.

20 One of my main concerns has always been fire in the area, with one road in, and one road out. I've heard from previous speakers, there would be 90 movements of vehicles per day. To add this to our other clients and residents in the area trying to move livestock during a fire would be catastrophic. I repeat; one road in, one road out, which reminds me of Black Saturday in Melbourne, 2009.

25 Solar farms can also have various impacts on horses. The noise disturbance and electromagnetic fields can alter horse behaviour. These may not be heard by humans, but can be heard by horses. This can lead to changes in their social dynamics, their feeding patterns, and general wellbeing. I have horses on my property valuing over half a million dollars, and priceless riding school horses, so
30 it's quite a difference. But I'm personally, concerned for the wellbeing of my animals that I've spent my life keeping happy and healthy.

Thank you.

35 **MR MILLS:** Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Nick O'Leary.

40 **MR NICK O'LEARY:** Good afternoon, panel, Chairman and Commissioners. My name is Nick O'Leary. I am a local resident and wine maker, owner of Nick O'Leary Wines and Nick O'Leary Cellar Door Restaurant, situated on Brooklands Road, just to the northwest of the proposed solar project.

45 I will mention we are supporters of renewable energy. Our main winery and vineyard sheds are covered in solar panels. We use minimal machinery and still hand prune and handpick all our vineyards. You could say we make our wines in a traditional manner.

Nick O'Leary wines has been operating for 17 years. We made a significant investment in the Hall-Wallaroo wine region when we bought a small existing

vineyard and 135 acre land holding, eight years ago. We have made significant investment in establishing a 500 ton crushed winery, and extending the vineyards to 35 acres, with more in the planning. We are one of the biggest producers in the Canberra district, buying grapes off other growers and leasing other vineyards in the Yass Valley area. We also make wine for other prominent local wine brands. Where we're standing right now in Murrumbateman is a prominent wine industry. We make some of the best cool climate wines in Australia.

There are four cellar doors in the Hall-Wallaroo subregion of the Canberra district, three of them with restaurants, and many other vineyards in the area. We are situated 25 minutes from the Canberra city, which was why I wanted to buy out there and set up a cellar door restaurant.

13 months ago, we opened our Cellar Door Restaurant and Function Centre, aimed at attracting Canberrans, Sydneysiders and interstate visitors. The two businesses employ around 30 direct employees, and many more indirect. This was a huge financial investment to showcase our wines, and share what is a very special place to the public; and that is Wallaroo. It is a beautiful place.

I feel we have achieved a massive interest in this venture, with well over 20,000 visitors in the last 12 months. Brindabella Hills Winery down the road have also had 20,000 visitors. If you look at the assessment report, section 4.3, 'Summary of Advice Received from Government Agencies,' Destination New South Wales is missing, our major tourism body. Why have we been forgotten?

I had to ring Destination New South Wales to see if they were aware of the project, and they were not. So I thought maybe ACT Tourism were aware of the project. They weren't either. Why weren't they consulted? Both entries from the Barton Highway say 'Hall Wineries.' There are signs on Northbourne Avenue in Canberra and on the way out two times in both directions. There are also signs on the Hume and Federal Highways promoting Canberra district wineries.

The industry brings in thousands of visitors a year into the Yass Valley and the Canberra region. Where has there been consultation amongst the stakeholders in this category? But they did check with the Mining and Exploration Department. They were notified. I think that is a joke.

My question is this, to the panel; where is the mention in the assessment report on the possible economic effects to winery, tourism and other businesses in the area, if a 100 megawatt, 185,000 panel solar factory is in the vicinity of this area? Will people want to get married in a rural vista if any industrial project of this size is in view of our rural setting? This would be the first thing, the first thing they see when they come down Gooromon Ponds Road or drive along Southwell Road. Not the beautiful rolling hills, but a massive industrial solar farm. And if this factory is approved, it would completely change the visual appeal on Wallaroo as a destination to visit.

Should New South Wales Treasury have been consulted? Will people lose their

5 jobs? Why hasn't this been considered? Why hasn't the economics been mentioned in detail on the other end of the scale, for the farmer, for the grape grower, for the local businesses, for the employees that have been in Wallaroo for years? For the people who have invested their life savings, their life savings, to live in this beautiful rural setting, just saying in a report that land values won't be affected, is just not good enough. It's not good enough.

10 There has been consultation – there has been a lack of consultation with those that have the most to lose. This report also states that in February of this year, representatives of the Department of Planning visited the site, and then they spoke to objectors of the project. Who were these objectors that were spoken to? They did not speak to anyone I know. They did not speak to any business owners in the district. And I just think that there has been a complete lack of consultation. And that's all I have to say. But I do have one thing; I can offer you something better than a cup of tea. I can offer you a glass of wine.

MR MILLS: Thank you, Nick. We have Margaret Armstrong on the phone. We don't? Hello, Margaret, can you hear us?

20 **MS MARGARET ARMSTRONG:** Yes, I can. Can you hear me all right?

MR MILLS: We can hear you very clearly. Thank you. Over to you for your submission. Thank you.

25 **MS ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. I'd like to thank the panel for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My first comment is to say that I most definitely am against the Wallaroo project. There are many reasons to object to wind and solar and best backup, and I'm sure you've heard them all at one point or another, so I'll –

30 [Loss of connection]

MR MILLS: Margaret, hello, can you hear us? Hello. Margaret, can you hear us?

35 **MS ARMSTRONG:** Yes, I can.

MR MILLS: I'm sorry, we lost you right at the beginning. I think we heard your first sentence or two only, so please feel free to start again.

40 **MS ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. I'm getting an echo feedback from your end.

MR MILLS: We're not at this end, unfortunately, so –

45 **MS ARMSTRONG:** All right, OK, just it's a bit off putting. I'll do my best. I'd like to thank the panel for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My first comment is to say that I will most definitely – I most definitely am against the Wallaroo project. There are many reasons to object to wind, solar and best backup, and I'm sure you've heard them all at one point or another, so I'll speak to you

from a different perspective this time.

5 Wallaroo is 1,000 megawatt solar with a small best backup. Sorry, it's 1,000 megawatt solar with a small best backup – 100 megawatt. The proponent has claimed that the project will provide electricity to approximately 48,000 homes. The fact is that this is not simply possible.

10 People take the proponents' statement at face value, but this is because they don't understand capacity factors. Solar panels are among the lowest energy density of all energy generators available in the world today. An added disadvantage is they are weather dependent, and only produce electricity when the sun is shining, and this is reduced further on cloudy days. Those 48,000 homes will only receive electricity part time. The backup batteries, at best, will even out the intermittent nature of the available sunshine when power dips, if a cloud comes over. Wind and solar are weather dependent forms of power generation. And they can never be relied upon to provide electricity as needed.

20 This statement that Wallaroo will provide electricity to 48,000 is only partly true. In fact, solar in Australia has been shown to provide electricity for just 20% of the time, on average over a year, as put out by an AEMO report. These houses will receive electricity at random intervals, or not at all, without the backup of coal or gas. Do you think is that this is what these people envisaged?

25 These lies must stop now. One of the organisations that advised the government on climate policy placed a full page ad in The Telegraph recently. It made five statements that were simply not true. The first claim was that "40% of our electricity comes from renewables right now," that's in quotes, sorry, close quotes. This claim is either from a lack of understanding of capacity factors and it omitted supply, or it is deliberately intended to mislead the public. The stated 40% is the installed capacity, not the actual output. You cannot compare installed capacity of renewables, which are weather dependent, as well as having a low capacity factor, with the capacity factors of coal, gas or nuclear, which are all engineered to provide electricity at rate of capacity, 24/7, or as required. This first statement is not correct.

35 The second statement, inverted commas, "Australia has the world's best renewables resources, so renewables make sense," close commas. A government report came out last year with maps indicating the most suitable locations for wind turbines, and this report showed that very few places in New South Wales were, in fact, suitable for wind turbines. This report was withdrawn a few days later, and subsequently reissued with revised parameters.

40 In our experience, the developers can't deny the lack of wind, but their solution is just to build more wind projects. But the thing is, no matter how many turbines or solar panels you install, if the wind isn't blowing and the sun isn't shining, there is no electricity. But they will boast about the install capacity as though it adds value.

We've had cloudy days out here in the central west renewable energy zone for

months now, so solar isn't doing much either. World's best energy resources is just a statement.

5 The third statement, inverted commas, "Lots of jobs." This statement is true, except that most of these jobs are filled by backpackers and short term visa holders. There will be 10,000 workers brought to our region alone at peak build. The Labour Council are already in the application process, with some of them already approved. This presents enormous problems for our communities. Our
10 populations are small and our unemployment levels are low. So to suggest that we may benefit in a big way from renewables employment is not true. Most of them are coming in from overseas.

15 The fourth statement, inverted commas, "Economic opportunity." The host landowners think they benefit, but end of life responsibility of the infrastructure and associated costs are likely to fall on them. Property values are adversely affected, and there are people who have difficulty selling their properties, as no one wants to live next door to renewables infrastructure.

20 The rest is just bribery, and the people don't get that they are funding their own so called benefits through taxes by way of subsidies. Where is the economic opportunity?

25 The fifth and last statement, "Driving down power place prices," is nothing short of insulting. The push for renewables started in earnest around 10 years ago here in Australia, and electricity costs have consistently risen year in, year out, since then. Manufacturing and small business have shut down because they cannot afford to pay the high cost of electricity.

30 Respectfully, you are public servants, and as such, the Australian people pay your salaries. There are many reasons that wind and solar have no place in our country, and you have been presented with these reasons for many years now by a number of experts in their field. You owe it to all Australians to listen to the voices that thus far you have chosen to ignore.

35 It isn't good enough that you only listen to the advice of those who will benefit financially from the roll out of renewables to the detriment of the rest of Australia. Again, respectfully, you need to step up and do the job that we pay you to do. There is a lot that is very wrong within the renewables industry, and it has been
40 ignored for far too long. Thank you for your time.

MR MILLS: No questions? OK, thank you. So we'll move on to back to the room. Stan Moore.

45 **MR STAN MOORE:** Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, thanks, Commissioners. I've heard a lot here today, and I concur with you. I come from just south of Goulburn, and we have a 400 megawatt solar factory proposal right beside my property, for some four kilometres. But I'm here to share some information that we have found out, and it has already been touched on by some

speakers here today.

5 The first one is contamination. The information that I've got from the Department of Planning says, oh, there is no leakage from solar panels. Well, I'd refer them to the University of Stuttgart, and their research found that there are unstable and soluble layers within the commercial photovoltaic modules. And during their long term tests for one and a half years, they found leaching.

10 There are many nasties in both solar panels, inverters, if they catch fire, batteries, if they catch fire. And some of them are actually carcinogenic. There should be, in our mind, there should be base level testing of soil and water, so before any development occurs, we need to know and have a base level, based on the nasties you might find in panels, whatever that panel is, and take a reading at the beginning, before any development. This will allow, if necessary, ongoing tests for 15 the issue of contamination. Also it relates to remediation. If you haven't got a base level of what's out there, how do you compare, and what do you know, from a chemical contamination point of view, what has to be cleaned up?

20 And in relation to contamination, the other issue, and we've heard from the citrus grower further down the river, the other issue is the grazing of sheep under the panels. They will be closer to the contamination. You need to have a look at the impact on the meat, and what contamination may happen there, and also because of some of the heavy metals, you'll also find that in wool. That is putting our meat and wool industry, our export industry, in jeopardy.

25 The other thing I wanted to touch on was the issue of remediation and decommissioning. We've done some costs, and I've relayed them to, and worked them out here, for what would be the remediation cost for 100 or 150 megawatt solar factory. The labour component alone to remove, or basically the opposite to 30 installing, so de-installing this, the labour component is over \$14 million. The labour component. All you have to do is work out how many workers they've got. There's 100 or 150 to 200 workers. And work out employing and engaging them to remove those panels, and it might take them nine months to do it. That's just the labour cost. There are other costs clearly associated with removing it.

35 But it raises the issue around transparency of who is responsible for decommissioning and remediation. Do you know from what you've read, who do you think is going to do this? And I ask the proposers, the Wallaroo Solar representatives here today, who is going to be responsible for the 40 decommissioning and remediation? Is it the developer, the operator at the time, or is it the property owner? And further, whoever is responsible, what is their capital backing? Do they have enough money to meet that liability? I think they are important questions you should be asking.

45 And finally, if I may just quickly touch on another issue which impacts on us directly having a farming operation beside now an industrial facility at Goulburn. And you talk about insurance. We're particularly interested in public liability insurance. If a fire was to start on a neighbouring property, and burn onto the solar

panels factory, and do, let's say, \$100 million worth of damage, you cannot get insurance in Australia for that. Even if you've got a lot of money, you cannot get it insured. And our solution is that the owner/operator should indemnify us as neighbours. Thank you.

5

MR MILLS: Thanks very much. Stan. No questions? Our next speaker is the net. Lynette LaBlack.

MR PEARSON: No, it's changed. I think it's changed.

10

MR MILLS: It's changed again. Sorry.

MR PEARSON: Lachlan.

15

MR MILLS: OK, so Lachlan is on first, sorry, thank you. Lachlan Mccaffrey. Lachlan?

MR LACHLAN MCCAFFREY: Yes.

20

MR MILLS: Excellent. Over to you, please, Lachlan.

25

MR MCCAFFREY: Thank you very much. Dear Office of the Independent Planning Commission New South Wales: I'd like to introduce and say hi to you personally. I'm sorry, I've been working since early this morning, so I've just literally found a quiet room to go through my slides and presentation. But first of all, just thanks for your time today, and listening to my concerns, re the Wallaroo Solar Farm.

30

Just throughout my slides, I would just love you to really appreciate to hold the consultant and report accountable to provide an unbiased, honest evaluation of the negative effects this will have on locals of the ACT and New South Wales surrounding suburbs, which includes thousands of residents. As I present today, I would just ask you all to put yourself in my shoes, and thousands of other residents in the area, and continue to ask yourselves, is this project fair?

35

I'm definitely not anti-renewables. I have the maximum amount of solar panels over my roof and sheds. But I am 100% certain this is not the right location, and it's against numerous forms of recent legislation. This is a 100 megawatt solar farm, 182,000 solar panels, 400 hectares, over 750 rugby fields in between housing. It's up to 650 metres from some residents' backyards. It will add it at 30% capacity, it will only produce power for 14,000 homes, but it will affect over 10,000 properties. So just logically, it doesn't weigh up.

40

New South Wales government legislation says this size solar farm can't fall within five kilometres from a town or suburb, but this falls within over 5,000 homes. So I'm just a little bit confused how it's against New South Wales planning rules. Why do they have a rule that protects their New South Wales residents, but if on the other side of the border, no one cares, I just don't understand how that's a

equality for Australians.

5 I really liked to quote from the Department of Planning, Industry and
Environment's Executive Director of State Policies and Strategic Advice, Felicity
Greenway, and she talks about how they've obviously brought in legislation to
protect, restrict renewable energy projects from building within five to 10
kilometre range. And she says, "That's why we've updated our planning policy
10 that covers infrastructure projects to ensure that solar and wind projects can only
be approved if they would not have significant impacts on the future use of land,
views and scenic quality of regional cities."

15 I just also, just really, as I'm going through the slides, the things I'm really
frustrated and confused about are, why should one or two landowners be rewarded
with all of the life savings that I've put into my property? And I've had a 15 year
career playing rugby, where nearly most years I would go under the knife for
surgery, and bought my dream property for – not for myself, but for my kids. I've
got two girls and one on the way. A really proud dad. And I've put everything into
giving them a good life in Wallaroo, and now it feels like it's somehow been taken
20 away and given to someone else that doesn't even live at that premises in
Wallaroo, or enjoy the community aspect that it provides.

But what I'd like to do is just go through my slides now, and give you a little bit
more of a sense and feel of why I'm so frustrated.

25 First of all, just some of the images from the report on slide 2, I'm moving on to.
This is, if you've ever spent much time in Wallaroo or the Brindabella Valley,
you'll be very confused at some of these images they've used. I'm not sure how
long ago they were used, but I'll show you some images I've taken in the next few
slides, and compare these images from the report, please, on slide 2, to some of the
30 images coming up that I've taken off a Google iPhone.

MR MILLS: Sorry, Lachlan, can I just drop in there? We don't have your slides
up. Did you send them through, or is it part of the submission that you sent
through?
35

MR MCCAFFREY: I did send them through, and I got an email yesterday that
said they got the slides and they'll have the presentation.

MR MILLS: Just hold a minute. We're just checking.
40

MR MCCAFFREY: No worries. I can wait. But I did get an email to say they
have received them.

45 **MR MILLS:** Yeah, apparently there's an issue with the file. But that's OK; as
Commissioners, we will get to see that once you'll be able to send that through,
and we'll be able to consider it. If you could perhaps just help us by describing the
slides as you go through, so that we have a bit of a picture now, and when we look
at them properly, we'll be able to do it then. Thank you.

MR MCCAFFREY: Okay, I'm sorry that didn't come through. It's a little bit hard without the images, but I'll just talk through them. It might not make sense, team, but I'll try my best.

5

So slide 2 is just some images used from the report. It doesn't say when dated, but they've tried to obviously show that the quality of Wallaroo and the prime grazing land is very different to what it is, or what I've known over the last three to four years.

10

If we go to slide 3, it was funny, it's dated 12th of February 2020, and this was the first visit ever to my property. I was playing at the Brumbies at the time, ACT Brumbies, and got a call from the neighbour who I knew. I'd been looking in the area for four years. I wanted to bring my kids up on the land, and give them that style of life around community and space and serenity.

15

When I went up that first day, I quickly drove from training, I went up and I sat on the deck, and the previous owner said to me, "Mate, these are the best views in Canberra. You'll always make your money back on this place." And he was spot on. I took a photo. I text my wife, I text my Mum and Dad, and I said, "I found my dream place. It's got the most pristine views in Canberra." And that's why every day I've loved coming home.

20

The next photo, slide 4, just a photo of my oldest daughter, (redacted), when we moved in. And just all these slides show the views of the Brindabellas, where all these solar panels are going to go into the background and destroy everything that I've bought and invested in there.

25

Slide 5 is just a screenshot of the dishonest report that the consultants have put together. It says, "Views towards the project will likely be filtered by intervening topography and existing vegetation. Where visible the project would occupy a relatively small portion of the view." Now, I wish you guys could see my slides, because that's one of the most dishonest things you could say. The next few slides, slide 6, I've got a photo from my iPhone during the day from my, just outside my lounge room window. Slide 7 is an evening view, and these will take your breath away some of these, some of these images, guys, and I'm excited for you to be able to see them.

30

35

And then slide 8 is the Wallaroo Solar Panel view, which the consultant provided. These are worse than they – they're bad enough, as you'll see on slide 8, but there's obviously, there's been some pine trees removed and planted some native trees and shrubs in those areas. So the view's even worse than what they've said. And I even asked the Wallaroo Solar Farm consultant to come back and take an updated view to make it fair, but they didn't have time to do that.

40

45

Slide 9 is just an image of me running out at GIO Stadium for our Grand Final for the ACT Brumbies. And as you'll see, I've got Indigenous artwork on my jersey with the Brindabella Rangers. This is something as Canberrans, ACT and New

5 South Wales, people were very passionate. And obviously, it's on our jersey. It's a prime piece of nature, in terms of the Brindabellas and the Murrumbidgee River flowing through it. And as I said at the start, I'm not against renewable energy. I just can't believe we're putting it at the foot of the Brindabellas and the Murrumbidgee River.

10 Then the last slide 10, and slide 11, team, is just images from my property, again, with blackout of where the Wallaroo Solar Farm panels are going to go. And obviously, please see the slides, and you'll realise why there's, why my property has been valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars less with this Wallaroo Solar Farm possibly going in. Because I've spent my life savings on a property because of the views, and now that's been taken away, and then a Wallaroo Solar Farm offering me bribe money of \$20,000 not to fight it, when my property's decreased in capital value of over hundreds of thousands of dollars, just doesn't make sense.

15 And then slide 12 is just around, is this fair? Are we creating equality for all in our decision making? I've been obviously a vice captain and captain of ACT Brumbies and national teams. And I think as politicians or planning ministers or all leaders in life, I guess as a leader, what I try to do before I go to sleep every night is understand, am I making the right decision for all? And if it's a yes, then I sleep well. If I'm making the decision for one or two, then it doesn't sit well in my stomach.

25 One property owner here making millions of dollars, one overseas company making millions of dollars, a report that is totally dishonest, bribes offered to residents to shut them up, and thousands of residents affected without being consulted. They've tried to slide this in the back door. A solar farm that doesn't align with any of the legislation being drafted to protect the rights of homeowners who have spent life savings on a property, to then have capital values depreciate by hundreds of thousands overnight. Everything I've ever worked for, and my wife has worked for, ruined. And I just, yeah, please do the right thing. Choose equality.

35 And yeah, I just thank you for your time today, and I bless you with the wisdom and strength and courage to make the right decision for thousands of residents over one or two people that are going to win big from this.

40 **MR MILLS:** Thank you, Lachlan. We'll take a very quick break for a few minutes.

SHORT BREAK

45 **MR MILLS:** All right. Thank you. We're good to resume. Our next speaker on the phone is Lynette LaBlack. Lynette, can you hear us? Lynette, hello?

MS LYNETTE LABLACK: Oh yes. Hello.

MR MILLS: Hello, yes. Welcome to the Wallaroo Solar Farm public meeting.

Over to you to make your presentation.

5 **MS LABLACK:** Thank you. Please begin with the first photo montage of the present site. Wallaroo Solar Electricity Generating Works and Battery defies all the principles of ecological, sustainable development and the New South Wales government's objectives of clean, reliable, affordable, secure energy. If approved, this –

10 [Loss of audio 03:52:53–03:53:06]

15 **MS LABLACK:** – it's claimed. There are no conditions included by the Department to guarantee the protection of the site or surrounding land and water sources from the typically irresponsible solar construction processes, the present solar on site, the typical damaging erosion and water sediment runoff, the inevitable toxic contamination resulting from onsite aged, degrading solar panels, if inferior, broken, fractured by hail or burn.

20 There is no acknowledgement of these obvious common occurrences in the assessment, and therefore no large scale cleanup, decontamination or evacuation plan for dealing with sudden destructive storm or hazardous toxic fire events, nor for the excessive toxic waste burden that will curse communities and our children's intergenerational equity.

25 The Department's recommendation for development consent of Wallaroo Solar is creating a set of circumstances that causes or threatens to cause material harm to the environment, involving actual or potential harm to the health or safety of human beings, or to ecosystems. That is not trivial. That results in actual or potential loss or property damage.

30 The EIS states that objectives of the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm are to generate renewable energy and improve network stability; minimise environmental impacts; minimise social impacts; and maximise social benefit. There is no public benefit from this project. It is the antithesis of caring for country and protecting nature. It is not for the greater good. Next photo please.

35 Unreliable, intermittent solar, wind and factories are not in the interests of consumers, defying national electricity law objectives of the price, quality, safety, reliability and security of supplier of electricity. The reliability, safety and security of the national electricity system. According to AEMO's long term data, solar only has an actual average capacity factor of 17%. So the proponent's weather dependent claims of powering approximately 48,000 homes is ludicrous and impossible.

40
45 The Department's – next slide please. The Department's approval of solar, wind electricity generating works and battery energy storage systems on RU1 land defies the Paris Agreement by threatening Australia's food security, as well as energy security, economic prosperity and national security. The Paris Agreement, Article 2, Section 1(b) of the Paris Agreement [unintelligible 03:55:56] 15 states:

“Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production.”

5 Yass Valley Council, the local regulatory authority, are ultimately responsible for any land, water, or water contamination or pollution caused by its solar electricity generating work, according to the POEO Act. Inflicting Wallaroo Solar and a big battery on the Yass Valley Council and community is a moral hazard and gross negligence, showing a lack of care that demonstrates reckless disregard for the
10 safety or lives of others, which is so great it appears to be a conscious violation of other people’s rights to safety.

The Department and previous IPCN panels’ reliance on obvious fabrications in the large scale solar guidelines is incorrect. To quote the Energy Assessment Director,
15 “In regard to your query regarding the issue of contamination, metals in solar panels cannot be easily released into the environment. This is because the metals are enclosed in thin layers between sheets of glass or plastic within the solar panel. Because of this, the use of metals in solar panels has not being found to pose a risk to the environment. To readily release contaminants into the environment, solar
20 panels would need to be ground to a fine dust.” This is not supported by any credible research or expert witness evidence.

The amended condition C8 prior to commencement of any work, Stormwater Management Plan set by Oxley Road Solar on 24th November 2022 in response to expert witness advice from Professor Ian Kleiner regarding solar’s inevitable toxic contamination impacts during operation, has not been included in the
25 Department’s conditions of consent. This includes regular [unintelligible 03:58:16] onsite and discharge from the site, availability of results, contamination response procedure, etc.

30 Inclusion of this is imperative on RU1 land with the Murrumbidgee River located only four kilometres to the west, and Gooromon Ponds and Ginninderra Creek forming part of the eastern and southern borders, respectively. It is completely wrong for the proponents to say the project is not in a water sensitive area or near
35 groundwater, that it remains consistent with ecological sustainable development, and is in the public interest.

Neither has the necessary new modern slavery condition, C4A been included by the Department for Wallaroo Solar, requiring proof prior to construction that no slave labour linked components will be used. This is shown in the slide; new
40 condition inserted, C4A. Next slide, please.

Reliable, ethical, secure, 24/7, far superior Australian solution equals nuclear power. It’s a minimal environmental footprint. One 75th of the land area required
45 for equivalent capacity industrialised solar. This would equate to approximately a bit over five hectares, compared to this 393 hectare part-time power contaminating disaster.

I've included part of the original view of my neighbouring property, now an unreliable, intermittent industrial [unintelligible 03:59:57] solar wasteland at the Bomen, Wagga Wagga. This is in the next slide.

5 With 500,000 toxic solar panels now forced on our community, with no social licence, the biodiversity and ecology of the area has been destroyed as solar developers denude the landscape, clear fell all the trees, leaving nothing but bits of logs for the displaced threatened species, followed by a haven of weeds, as shown in the photo. Creating a terrifying, toxic fire risk far too close proximity to
10 neighbours, as taken here from our fence line. Exclusion zones are essential and have not been included in the Department's conditions for Wallaroo Solar. The next photo highlights how close this is to our fence line.

15 The next photo shows our ugly eyesore view now, cursing our long-suffering community, who have great fears of solar's inevitable contamination impact to our highly productive Bomen Eunoony Valley area, as there's no guarantee for the removal and clean-up of any of this toxic junk, made worse by the fact that there is now a third owner since construction began in 2019. Alarming for our national security, the new Malaysian owner does not want [unintelligible 04:01:30] align
20 with China, and state B&B forge its strategic alliance with China's state-owned utilities to revolutionise the ASEAN power grid.

25 Operating conditions B28 state that the Applicant must minimise erosion and control sediment generation. But our multiple solar curse have well proven the reverse, with this particular area amidst our food production, already seriously harmed. Inadequate consideration has been given to the high, predictable, ruinous water, sediment, runoff and erosion damage well proven on undulating land in New South Wales from industrialised solar.

30 The following series of photos shows our area near the Murrumbidgee River, Wagga's essential water supply. One would think PFAS would have been a lesson. The following six photos show the extensive environmental damage already caused by wrongly approved industrialised solar at Bomen, Wagga Wagga. Far worse is yet to come when inevitable toxic contamination occurs onsite and for
35 surrounding land water from common degradation event, and events such as hail storms and solar battery fires. The Department and previous Independent Planning Commission panels have continually failed to acknowledge and address these public health and safety risks to our food producing land and vital water sources.

40 **MR MILLS:** Lynette, you're just a little over time now. I was wondering if you can make your last final couple of points, please, and then we'll have to finish up. Thank you. We will be able to receive anything in writing from you, of course.

45 **MS LABLACK:** All right. I've just got the two photos of the farcical biodiversity offsets to show, and the final – after this one – and the final photos are more public health and safety risks from the renewable industry, including hazardous transportation practices of dodging solar developers, typically cutting corners, using inexperienced visa drivers, consequential contamination disasters left

adjacent to roadside farming land amidst running water, and also the unethical nature of industrialised solar, with clear evidence of the typical reliance on unethical, cruelly tortured Uyghur slave labour and components, clearly shown here in the final photo, with packaging marked with JA solar panels, destined for the Stubbo Solar Gulgong in the central west.

MR MILLS: Thank you, and thank you for your time and the presentation.

MS LABLACK: Thank you.

MR MILLS: That brings us to an end of the public submissions that we're having brought to us today, but just a reminder, there's still plenty of opportunity to send material to the Commission for us to consider.

I'm going to call on the Applicant again, Ben Cranston, to come forward and if possible respond to some of the matters that have been raised during the course of today. And if not, Ben, to take those matters on notice that you can't deal with today.

MR CRANSTON: I'd like to thank everyone for their submissions today, I'll start by saying most of the issues raised, they are well known to the project, and have been raised at various points throughout the development and consultation process, and have been included in our Environmental Impact Statement and response to submissions. I'll go through some of the points that are raised, but if I've missed any that are important, I will take them on notice.

The size and scope of the project has been mentioned multiple times, that we're covering 393 hectares with the project. This is the overall area of the two sites, and with the actual development footprint being 165 hectares, and this includes 16 hectares of native vegetation plantings as part of the project.

Another point raised was the assessment changing across state and territory borders, To clarify, the social and environmental assessment does not distinguish between New South Wales or ACT residents. They are treated equally and consistently in consideration of the impacts. This is the same for all residents, regardless of potential neighbour agreements. All properties were assessed equally, and none were removed from assessment after assigning a neighbour agreement.

The next point was the school bus times. Traffic and pedestrian safety has been heard and discussed in detail with the community. The project is committed to avoiding all heavy vehicle movements during school bus pickup and drop off times to avoid any interaction between buses and traffic – between the buses and the heavy vehicles. The traffic management plan will be put in place that will dictate how communication will be done with the bus companies to avoid any interaction.

Next point raised was road conditions. This is well understood, and from the

project side, and extensive consultation with Council has occurred, and appropriate measures are in place in the conditions of consent.

5 Remediation post-operation, so remediation of the project site post-operation. These are covered under a remediation bond clause in the lease agreements. The Department assessment also addresses this, but in the end, it will be the project responsible, and there will be bonds in place, so there's, yeah, the funds are there to remediate the project at the end of life.

10 **MR PEARSON:** Can I just ask a question on that, Ben, the remediation bond. Who's that payable to? And it's not in the conditions of consent, to my knowledge.

15 **MR CRANSTON:** So the remediation – oh, sorry, remediation works of the site is in the conditions of consent, I believe. But the remediation bond, sorry, I should clarify that; the remediation bond, that's an agreement between the landowner and the project. And how that's worked out depends –

20 [Inaudible from audience]

MR CRANSTON: Well, that's – yeah, because otherwise the landowner is going to be potentially responsible for it. So the money is there set aside to make sure that the funds are there to clean it up.

25 **MR PEARSON:** Thank you.

MR CRANSTON: No problem. Fox and pests were raised as well. A pest and weed management plan will be prepared to manage the occurrence of priority weeds and pest species across the site during construction and operation. The plans will be prepared in accordance with Yass Valley Council and the New South Wales DPI requirements.

35 Another one, the vegetation screening, if approved, the native vegetation planting is proposed to be installed at the pre-construction stage, and will introduce 16 hectares of native vegetation to the land that is currently graded pasture. This vegetation planting is not designed to totally block the site from view, but to break up the view with native vegetation and encourage further species to the area.

40 To clarify, a local landscape architect was involved with the design of the project specifically – sorry, with the aim to minimise visibility and mitigation measures to best blend the project into the landscape. A subsequent landscape architect was Commissioned to complete the detailed visual impact assessment, in line with the new guidelines that were updated halfway through the project development.

45 Another thing that was raised was transmission lines. External transmission lines are not proposed as part of the project, and all the substation transmission line works for the project have been directly paid for by the project.

5 The next point was slave labour. So the employment standards of overseas panel solar panel manufacturers is an important ethical issue. Whilst this is not considered a planning issue, as it is outside the scope of what the Department can consider in making a determination on the DA, the Applicant supports supplying the highest possible levels of transparency in line with our environmental, social governance policy, and compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2018. While we consider this an industry wide issue, rather than an issue specific to the project, we would support any condition aimed at the independent verification of the source of our components and materials.

10 So the five kilometre rule has been brought up a few times as well. There appears to be some misunderstanding regarding the New South Wales environmental planning instruments concerning the allowance of renewable energy projects within five kilometres of specified New South Wales regional cities, and that potentially, the project's using a loophole.

15 It's my understanding that renewable energy projects are not banned in these areas, but increased assessment is required. This is something the Department may want to address further. Regardless, the project has considered all impacts appropriately, and to the same level as for any location.

20 The next point was consultation with First Nations. First Nations people were consulted in depth throughout the development process, both in terms of social impacts and potential impacts to the Aboriginal cultural heritage. Detailed cultural heritage excavations were completed throughout the project site by a local First Nations group, with the aim to identify whether the project would involve any unacceptable impacts to the land or potential artifacts, and no unacceptable impacts were identified.

25 So the next one is Parkwood alternative site access. There's currently no road access, either existing or proposed that would allow for access via the Parkwood area. Extensive consultation has been completed with Yass Council to address safety concerns raised during the development process.

30 ACT planning consultation. That was raised. All relevant ACT government agencies were consulted during the development, with no direct concerns raised.

35 Murrumbidgee; so the contamination of water and fire – fire contamination. These are well understood concerns that are not unique to this project. The conditions of its consent cover this. There are well established procedures in place to address this concern, and onsite management plans will further address this.

40 And then finally, visual impact assessment, and the way the photos were taken. The images included in the visual impact assessment are taken in a way that is prescribed by the guidelines. All images included in our reports have been taken in line with these guidelines to allow for consistent assessment and to show accurate potential impacts in accordance with the guidelines. On top of this, we've worked closely with residents to discuss the potential visual impacts, and have gone as far

as preparing artists impressions early in the development process for those who requested them, as a way to show potential impacts. These artists impressions further helped inform the amendments that were made to the operational footprint to reduce the visual impacts. And that's all I have for now, thank you.

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MR MILLS: Thank you. I don't think we have any other questions immediately from the panel now, thanks, Ben.

MR CRANSTON: No worries, thank you.

10

MR MILLS: The Department. Is the Department available? Iwan Davies, are you there?

MR IWAN DAVIES: Yep, I am.

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MR MILLS: Iwan, it's Andrew Mills. You and your team have had the opportunity, I understand, to listen into the proceedings today. Are there matters that you would like to respond to that have been raised?

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MR DAVIES: No direct matters, but open to questions.

MR MILLS: Please go ahead. Sorry, questions. Sorry, I thought you said corrections. Did we not have a couple of questions sent through? Not from the audience, I'm sorry.

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[Inaudible from the audience]

MR MILLS: So there have been questions raised in relation to engagement with the ACT government, both the tourism of the ACT government, apart from the planning arm. Can you advise what engagement occurred across the ACT government Departments?

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MR DAVIES: Absolutely. The project was exhibited for a period of 28 days, and the Applicant had the opportunity to respond to those submissions in terms of the Department's engagement with the ACT government. So the Department sought advice from the broader ACT government during the exhibition period, and then again, once the response to submissions was received, and also on the draft conditions of consent.

35

So that was sent to the ACT government and the Department's understanding was that the ACT government then sent that out to each of its relevant agencies, which included the planning arm, the transport arm, others. I couldn't comment on the ACT government's behalf. But the Department reached out to the ACT government itself, which then consulted within its own government.

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The Department did – one thing I do want to flag, is the Department did, late last week, receive some additional comments from the ACT government, which the Department will forward through to the IPC.

MR MILLS: Thank you.

5 **MR PEARSON:** I can ask a question, Iwan. It's Richard Pearson. So if we pretended that the border wasn't there and Canberra was in New South Wales, would there be any different outcome in terms of the Department's assessment of the project? Is there anything in any Departmental policies that would restrict the ability to have a solar farm in proximity to an urban area such as Canberra? It's been raised a number of times today that there's a bit of jurisdictional confusion, here that the developer's getting away with something because there's a boundary there. Are you able to talk to that issue, please?

15 **MR DAVIES:** Absolutely. Thanks, Richard. To confirm, our assessment would not change, whether that border was there or not. The Department undertook a full assessment. Sorry, I'm hearing myself twice. The Department's assessment would not change. We undertook a full, detailed assessment, regardless of whether that border was there or not. You or the audience may be referring to the regional cities within New South Wales.

20 **MR PEARSON:** Yes, I think that's correct.

MR DAVIES: There's no prohibition there. It is simply that the Department has to consider some matters, including conflict with residential and commercial uses, capacity for growth and scenic quality, which the Department undertakes anyway. So there is no – our assessment would not change whether that border was there or not. The Department considers that the impacts are not significant and acceptable.

30 **DR EVANS:** So Iwan, it's Bronwyn Evans here. One topic that was raised was advice received from New South Wales government agencies and a note that Destination New South Wales was not included as the agencies consulted. Were they, or is it possible for Destination New South Wales to be one of those agencies included?

35 **MR DAVIES:** Thank you, Bronwyn. My understanding, and I'm happy to be corrected, is that we did not consult with Destination New South Wales. Now, the Department undertook a full assessment of the potential impacts on all potentially impacted receivers, including tourism operators and wineries, and concluded that the impacts were not significant. We would be happy to, at the IPC's request, or happy to proactively do so, reach out to Destination New South Wales. But to confirm, the Department did consider impacts on all potentially impacted receivers, not simply on dwellings, and on tourism operators, on road users and others.

45 **DR EVANS:** Thank you.

[Inaudible from the audience]

MR PEARSON: Sure. Iwan, the only other question that came up quite a lot was

– well, there were a lot of questions that came up quite a lot, but that you might have a view on is the decommissioning, and the concern that the Applicant may on-sell this to someone else, who may on-sell it to someone else, and in 30 years' time the line between the original approval and whoever owns the solar farm may get lost. Do you have any comments on the accountability, how the accountability might lie in 30 years' time when we have a condition of consent, but not, not a great deal of specifics around it.

MR DAVIES: Sorry, the line went a little bit quiet there.

MR PEARSON: Yeah, I think I had a mic malfunction. So just briefly, in terms of decommissioning, Iwan, the Applicant on-sells, and they on-sell, and in 30 years' time, it's time to decommission. What hold is there over the, I guess the landowner, and/or whoever owns the solar farm at that time, to ensure that decommissioning occurs properly, and the land could be returned to productive use? Can you draw the line through that process for us, please?

MR DAVIES: Yeah, sure. So the responsibility lies between the Applicant and the landowner for decommissioning of the project. So I do want to make that clear. So the Department has to strengthen. That included a, as you mentioned, or as you stated, a decommissioning and rehabilitation condition, which includes measures to ensure that the land is returned to pre-existing use.

That infrastructure, including underground infrastructure, is removed if operations cease. That the owner or operator of the solar to provide clarity, the owner or operator of a solar energy project should be responsible for the decommissioning. The Department considers that the project would be suitably decommissioned, rehabilitated with the implementation of those objective-based conditions.

MR PEARSON: Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you. I don't think there's anything else from you that's required today. Obviously we may come back to you. If we do go back to the Department, anything, any discussions we have with the Department will be made public, there will be a record of them and available for anyone.

MR DAVIES: Thank you.

MR MILLS: Thank you.

MR PEARSON: Thanks Iwan.

MR MILLS: That brings us to an end of this public meeting into the Wallaroo Solar Farm. I would like to thank everyone who has participated in this important process. Dr Bronwyn Evans, Richard Pearson and I have appreciated your input. There's a reminder that it's not too late to have your say on this application on the website; please click on the 'make a submission' portal and send a submission either that way, or to us via email or post. The deadline is next Thursday for

submissions, 5:00pm on the 25th of July 2024.

5 As was noted earlier in the day, in the interests of openness and transparency, we will be making a full transcript of this public meeting available on our website in coming days. At the time of the ultimate determination, the Commission will publish its statements of reasons for its decision, which will outline how the panel took into account the community's views as part of that decision making process.

10 Again, finally, a very quick thank you to my fellow Commissioners, Dr Bronwyn Evans and Richard Pearson, and to the support I've received from the staff here today. Thank you for those online who've been watching, and from all of us here at the Commission, please enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you.

15 **>THE MEETING CONCLUDED**