March 2023

YASS SOLAR ENERGY PARK COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Q&A

Following ENGIE's early engagement activities and discussions with local community members and other stakeholders, we have collated a series of questions and responses to the key topics raised in relation to the Yass Solar Energy Park project.

Why Yass?

The proposed site for the Yass Solar Energy Park is located south-west of the Yass township, with a potential development footprint of approximately 328 hectares. The area is characterised by gently undulating terrain and is largely used for grazing purposes.

The proposed site has been selected based on a number of factors including:

- the location of the proposed project provides suitable solar resources
- the proposed project is located predominantly on existing agricultural land and will not impact the productive capacity of the land
- the proposed project can be connected into the national electricity grid through Transgrid's Yass substation, with available network capacity and use of existing transmission lines
- land availability and support from landowners.

Are there any examples of other solar farms near townships?

The 60MW Yanco Solar Farm acquired by Origin Energy, is located around 1km west of the township of Yanco near Leeton, NSW and shares similar land and infrastructure characteristics with the proposed Yass Solar Energy Park project. Similarly, the Yanco Solar Farm will connect into an existing substation facility and utilise transmission lines.

With regard to the Yass project, although the chance of an outage on the transmission line is low, by keeping the length of transmission lines as short as possible, the risk of power and thermal losses resulting in an outage is reduced.

The Yanco Solar Farm received approval from NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE), and considered the site to be appropriate for the project due to its good solar resources and available capacity on the existing electricity network.

ENGIE will continue to consult and engage with those residents living closest to the project to ensure their concerns are considered in the design of the project and help inform strategies to avoid or minimise potential impacts.

Will the project expand if more land becomes available?

Availability of suitable land for the proposed project is dependent on a variety of factors. Initial investigations are underway to understand the environmental and engineering considerations across three landowners' sites, which will inform the concept design and form part of our Scoping Report to be lodged with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE).

ENGIE will continue to actively engage with landholders, neighbours, and the local community throughout the scoping phase to identify local considerations that will assist in developing a design for the proposed energy park.

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Zoning of proposed land

ENGIE is currently conducting further investigations on the rezoning of the proposed land for the project. As part of these investigations, ENGIE will review the recommendations outlined in the *Yass Valley Settlement Strategy 2036*, to help guide the development planning and ensure the project has a positive and sustainable impact on the local community and the broader Yass Valley region.

The lots proposed for the project are currently zoned under five different land use zones with the current proposed project footprint to be located only in areas of the lots that are zoned C4 Environmental Living and SP2 Electricity Generating Works. Under the NSW Government planning system, an electricity generator like the proposed Yass Solar Energy Park, is permissible with consent by the DPE under the State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021.

Landowners are encouraged to contact our team with any rezoning or planning proposals lodged with Council and DPE for review and consideration with respect to the proposed project.

Will the solar energy park affect property / land value?

It is important to note, many factors influence land and property prices and there is a limited amount of information to determine the effect of solar farms on rural land values.

As part of the *Yanco Solar Farm, State Significant Development Assessment Report, July 2020*, (DPIE, 2020) the Department noted that there is no clear evidence to suggest that solar farms in NSW are adversely affecting property values. The Department also considered the project would not result in any significant or widespread reduction in land values in the areas surrounding the Yanco Solar Farm. The full assessment report can be found on the NSW Government's Major Projects Planning Portal at: **https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-9515%2120200716T070321.929%20GMT**.

The proposed Yass Solar Energy Park project is unlikely to significantly reduce the overall agricultural productivity of the region and, as part of the decommissioning process, the owner of the energy park would be required to rehabilitate the land and return the site to agricultural use.

What is involved in the approvals process?

We are currently undertaking preliminary investigations and engaging with local community members to better understand community views to be considered in refining a concept design. The project will require planning approval from the DPE, which will involve a Scoping Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). An outline of what to expect during the development and approvals stages is provided below.

Planning and Approvals

The proposed design of the project layout takes place during the Planning and Approvals stage. Community feedback and input will help shape the design of the project and a series of studies will take place to assess a range of factors including:

- Biodiversity assessments
- Cultural heritage
- Historic heritage
- Preliminary hazards analysis
- Noise and visual
- Traffic and transport
- Grid connection feasibility and cost
- Geotechnical and hydrology assessments
- Topography

Findings from these assessments will inform the relevant planning requirements, reports and applications.

Throughout the development process, we will work within the *NSW Large-Scale Solar Energy Guidelines* and follow recommendations by the Clean Energy Council, Re-Alliance and the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. This will guide opportunities for community feedback and collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure the project has a positive impact on the local and broader environment.

Scoping Report lodgement

A Scoping Report will be lodged with the DPE, detailing results of the early engagement and preliminary studies. Following submission of the Scoping Report, the DPE will publish the report online and seek advice from key government agencies, during preparation of the Secretary's Environmental and Assessment Requirements (SEARs). The SEARs specify what issues are required to be addressed within the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

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Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) lodgement and exhibition

The EIS will detail the proposed design, results of the specialist studies and engagement outcomes. The EIS will be lodged with DPE before being placed on public exhibition for at least 28 days, for formal community and stakeholder feedback. All submissions received during the public exhibition period will be formally responded to in the Response to Submissions, which shows how the matters raised in the submissions will be addressed.

Engagement and specialist studies

Continued community feedback during the approvals phase will assist in identifying matters to be considered in environmental, cultural and social studies that will ultimately be factored into the design and operations of the energy park. Feedback will also be used to minimise potential impacts and maximise benefits to the community.

Impact Management

Visual and landscape

Specialist consultants will be engaged to undertake a detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the proposed project. The assessment will consider the potential impacts of the project including reflectivity and glare in relation to the solar panels.

As part of the assessment, consultants will take into account the visual amenity of the energy park, topography, vegetation and other screening factors. Specialised modelling tools and visualisations (including photomontages) will be developed to illustrate potential views of the project from key public viewpoints identified through the Scoping Report.

Native vegetation that is local to the area can be used to preserve its local amenity and ecosystem and break up potential views of infrastructure.

Health

As part of the EIS, an Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) assessment will be prepared, which will assess the potential impacts and risks to human health associated with the EMF generated by the solar farm electrical infrastructure. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) recognises that no adverse health effects from long-term exposure to extremely low frequency EMF have been confirmed.

Cropping and grazing

The proposed site for the Yass Solar Energy Park is primarily used for grazing. The project design would allow for diversity in land use and would not remove the potential to use the land for cropping at the end of the energy park's life (expected to be 30 years). Depending on agreements with landowners, some grazing may take place once operational, for production purposes and also to control grass and weed growth around the solar arrays.

Following decommissioning, disturbed land would be rehabilitated to its former condition, as part of the Development Approval conditions and landowner agreements.

ENGIE is investigating agrisolar and agrivoltaic projects that involve the co-location of specific crops and vegetation that thrive in varying light and rainwater runoff conditions produced by solar panels.

Hazards and risks

Industry professionals will be engaged to undertake a series of specialist assessments to be included in the EIS and inform our mitigation measures with regard to potential hazards and risks, including fire, flooding and hydrology.

Fire: In consultation with the NSW Rural Fire Service and specialist consultants, a Preliminary Hazards Assessment and a Bushfire Risk Assessment will be undertaken to assess potential hazards and risks associated with the project and in the event of a bushfire. This includes potential hazards associated with the inclusion of a battery energy storage system. The assessment will aim to demonstrate that the proposed energy park can be designed, constructed and operated to minimise ignition risks and provide for asset protection. Some of the mitigation measures to be considered include:

- improvements to access roads to improve access and response times of firefighting vehicles
- provision of on-site water tanks
- asset protection zones (if required).

Flooding and Hydrology: A Flooding and Hydrology Assessment will assess the existing and post-development flood behaviour. A Water Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that impacts such as excavation, road works and transport of machinery are adequately mitigated through avoidance, minimisation and management.

The assessment will also identify and quantify sources of water required during construction and operation of the project. Any existing dams or bores on site may be considered for water sourcing.

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Noise

A specialist acoustic consultant will be engaged to assess potential construction and operational noise impact levels and duration from the project site to surrounding areas. Noise levels will be further assessed during the noise and vibration assessment for the EIS and will be developed in accordance with industry standards and guidelines.

End of life and decommissioning

Decommissioning is the responsibility of the energy park owner. At the end of the project's operating life, ENGIE will be required to remove all solar panels and other fittings, and rehabilitate the land to its former condition, as part of the Government's approval conditions and landowner agreements.

As part of standard approval conditions, a decommissioning plan will be required to be submitted to the DPE for approval before construction of the energy park can commence.

The Clean Energy Council has a working group to manage re-use of materials at the energy park end of life. If a business case arises to 'repower' and extend the project, a new agreement with the project owner and landowner may be initiated, and a further Development Approval will be sought. Alternatively, the land would be reverted back to its former agricultural use.

How does solar power work?

Solar energy is an abundant source of free energy that can be converted into electricity using a range of ever-improving techniques. Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels are currently the most widespread type of solar PV technology. Generally, solar panels are made of a layer of silicon cells, a metal frame, glass casing, and wiring to allow current to flow from the silicon cells. When sunlight is absorbed by the silicon cell, it causes electrons to start moving, which initiates a flow of electric current. Even in low light or foggy conditions, the panels are able to capture the sun's energy. For more information, visit: **engie.com.au/home/about-engie/education/how-does-solar-power-work**.

General maintenance and panel cleaning

Ongoing maintenance will be required for all infrastructure associated with the project, including landscaping and cleaning of the solar panels.

ENGIE will explore several options for cleaning and general maintenance of the solar panels, which will depend on the size and design of the solar farm. It is not recommended to clean the panels with detergent or chemicals as it will scratch the solar panels and reduce the absorption of the sun's rays for power production. The use of a low-pressure hose with available water on site may be sufficient as the tilt of the panels prevents the collection of dust, unlike flat panels.

Pruning and weeding would be undertaken as required to maintain visual amenity. Mitigation measures to reduce the chance of the spread of weeds will be considered within the EIS. Once operating, regular ongoing maintenance activities will be conducted.

We expect a number of skills and suppliers to be required during the construction phase and once operational. ENGIE is committed to generating more jobs for local residents and opportunities for local businesses and suppliers.

What's next?

The team will continue to engage with the local community and other stakeholders to capture valuable local feedback to help shape the project and maximise benefits to the community.

The results of ENGIE's early engagement and preliminary studies will be incorporated into the Scoping Report and submitted to the DPE with a request for SEARs. DPE will publish the Scoping Report on its Planning Portal website and information on where to view the Scoping Report will be provided via email to Yass Solar Energy Park mailing list subscribers.

Contact us

At ENGIE we recognise the value of open and transparent conversations with local community members. If you have any questions about the Yass Solar Energy Park or would like to join our mailing list, please reach out to us.

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