



# Social Impact Assessment

## Goorambat East Solar Farm

NEOEN

18 November 2021





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<b>Printed date</b>	18/11/2021 8:42:00 AM
<b>Last saved date</b>	18 November 2021 8:42 AM
<b>File name</b>	Social Impact Assessment
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<b>Client name</b>	NEOEN
<b>Project name</b>	Goorambat East Solar Farm
<b>Document title</b>	Social Impact Assessment   Goorambat East Solar Farm
<b>Revision version</b>	Rev 0
<b>Project number</b>	12561113

**Document status**

Status Code	Revision	Author	Reviewer		Approved for issue		
			Name	Signature	Name	Signature	Date
S3	Draft	Dr Ceit Wilson Stephanie Munns	Dr Pallavi Mandke	On file	Dr Pallavi Mandke	On file	01/11/2021
S3	Draft Final	Dr Ceit Wilson Stephanie Munns	Dr Pallavi Mandke	On file	Dr Pallavi Mandke	On file	12/11/2021
S4	Final	Dr Ceit Wilson Stephanie Munns	Dr Pallavi Mandke		Dr Pallavi Mandke		18/11/2021

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# Executive summary

Neoen Australia Pty Ltd (Neoen) is the owner of the proposed Goorambat East Solar Farm (the Project), a solar energy facility to be developed on leased land approximately 500 metres south from the community of Goorambat, within the Rural City of Benalla, Victoria.

This social impact assessment (SIA) identifies the potential social impacts and benefits to local communities arising from the construction and operation of the Project. In conjunction with other technical documents prepared by Neoen, this assessment will support the Project's application for participation in the Victorian Renewable Energy Auction Scheme (VRET2).

## Scope and methodology

This SIA has been developed based on the requirements set out in the Victorian Government's Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development in Victoria Guide (DELWP, 2021), as well as best practice methodologies established by a range of other relevant policies and guidelines.

The study area for the assessment was defined as the Project site area and adjoining properties, the local community of Goorambat, and the broader Benalla Local Government Area (the region).

To establish potential impacts upon these stakeholders, the SIA included a review of existing literature relevant to the project and existing socio-economic context. This was followed by targeted stakeholder consultation with local and regional stakeholders, including host landholders, neighbouring property owners, businesses, local government, State / Federal Members of Parliament, service providers and local community groups.

The SIA established that the Project has the potential for both positive and negative social impacts. These were assessed and reported across several themes: population change; livelihoods, employment and economic opportunities; housing and accommodation; access to community infrastructure, facilities and services; community health and wellbeing; and access and connectivity.

## Benefits

The Project presents opportunities for positive social impacts, primarily in relation to enhanced income revenue for host landholders, employment, business procurement opportunities, training and career pathway development, and social investment opportunities through the Community Benefit Scheme in the local and regional study areas (Table 1). Stakeholders interviewed largely viewed Neoen's presence positively, particularly with regard to direct and indirect employment provision and the Project's contribution to the economy. The proposed Community Benefit Scheme was well received by the stakeholders. Stakeholders identified multiple avenues through which to enhance the positive opportunities associated with the Project, including collaboration with local training providers, early communication from the Project on supply opportunities, and support for existing organisations and initiatives focused on improving socio-economic development in the region.

**Table 1** Summary of social benefits from Project

Livelihoods, employment and economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Direct project employment and procurement opportunities.</li><li>– Indirect employment through procurement opportunities.</li><li>– Additional revenue for local accommodation providers through increased demand for visitor accommodation.</li><li>– Increased local trade and revenue associated with expenditure of wages from employees.</li><li>– Enhanced economic prosperity to landholders through additional income from Project payments, with an associated range of benefits (enhanced long-term farm viability, greater likelihood of farm succession, continuation of income from 'agrisolar' techniques).</li><li>– Opportunities to enhance skills and capacity of young persons, women, Indigenous people (and Project employees in general) through increased training opportunities.</li></ul>
Community health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Opportunities for enhanced socio-economic wellbeing in local and regional communities through social investment projects supported by the Neoen Community Benefit Scheme.</li></ul>

## Impacts

Without appropriate mitigation strategies, the Project has the potential to result in negative impacts, primarily in relation to changes to existing local amenity with flow-on impacts to community wellbeing (Table 2).

Nearly all stakeholders who participated in SIA consultation held concerns about the likelihood of the project to result in changes to local visual amenity. Other potential impacts identified in the assessment with a high to medium consequence (prior to the application of management measures), included: impacts from noise, dust, light and increased traffic during construction, as well as glare effects and potential risk of fire hazards during operation, affecting neighbouring landholders' ability to enjoy their property; concerns around reductions in property prices; disruption to local traffic and impacts to traffic safety during construction, and concerns around perceived cumulative loss of agricultural land / rural landscape.

Neoen proposes to manage these impacts through implementation of the following:

- Ongoing engagement with affected stakeholders and broader community, as guided by the Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan.
- Implementation of a Community Complaints Management Mechanism.
- Compensation for temporary disturbances through Neighbour Construction Disruption Payments.
- Mitigating visual and glare impacts through early establishment of buffer planting, in accordance with a Landscaping Screening Plan.
- Measures to mitigate the impacts of noise, dust, vibration, light, and traffic disruptions, in accordance with the Construction Management Plan and Environmental Management Plan.
- Measures to address changes to traffic network and travel safety, through implementation of a Traffic Management Plan.
- Implementation of sheep grazing for maintenance of the solar farm (agrisolar) to mitigate loss of agricultural land.

The assessment shows that impacts arising from the proposal would reduce to a low or medium residual significance following implementation of management measures.

**Table 2** Summary of social impacts from Project

Livelihoods, employment and economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Temporary disruption to host landholder farming / land use activities during construction.</li> <li>– Competition for labour in the regional study area.</li> </ul>
Housing and accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased demand for housing and accommodation access in local and regional communities.</li> <li>– Anxiety and resulting stress for adjoining property owners arising from the perceived potential impact of the Project on property values and potential fire hazard from the project infrastructure.</li> </ul>
Community infrastructure and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased demand on regional health services.</li> <li>– Increased demand on emergency services (fire, ambulance and police).</li> </ul>
Community health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Environmental stressors (noise, dust, light and traffic) affecting quality of life for host landholders and neighbouring landholders during construction.</li> <li>– Project operation may expose host landholders and neighbouring landholders to amenity changes such as increase in light (i.e. through glare).</li> <li>– Changes to visual amenity and sense of place.</li> <li>– Changes in perception of personal safety associated with construction workforce and temporary increase in population.</li> <li>– Intensification of community concerns associated with COVID-19.</li> <li>– Perceived impacts to traffic safety</li> </ul>
Access and connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Disruption to local traffic movement during construction.</li> </ul>

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this report

Neoen Australia Pty Ltd (Neoen) is the owner of the proposed Goorambat East Solar Farm (the Project), a solar energy facility to be developed on leased land approximately 500 metres (m) south from the community of Goorambat, within the Rural City of Benalla, Victoria. The Project received development approval from Benalla Rural City Council in January 2020 and is currently in the pre-construction phase, with construction anticipated to commence in 2022 (Section 1.2).

In August 2021, Neoen commissioned GHD Australia Pty Ltd (GHD) to undertake a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the Project in support of the Project's application for participation in the Victorian Renewable Energy Auction Scheme (VRET2). In accordance with the Victorian Government's *Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development in Victoria Guide* ('VRET2 Guide for Renewable Energy Developers') (DEWLP, 2021), renewable energy developers intending to participate in the VRET2 are required to demonstrate their understanding of the project's host community context and potential social impacts through submission of a SIA.

This SIA Report (the Report) presents the outcomes of the SIA conducted in response to this requirement. Specifically, the Report:

- describes the existing socio-economic context of local communities relevant to the project
- identifies potential social impacts (both positive and negative) of the Project and assesses their significance
- outlines measures that will be undertaken by Neoen to enhance potential social benefits and mitigate and/or manage negative social impacts of the Project.

The SIA has been guided primarily by the requirements set out in the VRET2 Guide for Renewable Energy Developers, as well as the framework for best practice social impact assessment outlined by the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) Guidance Note (Vanclay et al., 2015).

It has also been informed by an inclusive stakeholder consultation programme, which sought input from key project-affected stakeholders and members of the broader local community, where relevant.

Overall, the Report will provide Neoen a basis from which to monitor and manage key social impacts of the Project for the life of the development.

## 1.2 The Project

### 1.2.1 Background

Neoen is a developer, owner and operator of renewable energy assets. Neoen has an established track record with 14 wind, solar and battery storage projects operating or under construction across Australia, including Bulgana (wind and battery) and Numrukah (solar) in Victoria (Figure 1-1).

The Project is the latest renewable energy facility being developed and operated by Neoen in Victoria. Neoen's opportunity in the Goorambat region came about in 2018 when the company was approached by a consortium of local landholders. Stakeholder consultation undertaken for this SIA identified Neoen was chosen by the landowner consortium due to their:

- integrated approach to land leasing and commitment to long-term project ownership to ensure land stewardship
- focus on integrating solar farm infrastructure into active farming practices to allow 'co-existence'
- respectful approach to landholder engagement and communication
- recognised responsibility to deliver broader community benefit beyond immediate host landholders.

Feasibility studies conducted in late 2018 determined two potential sites for a solar farm development. These two sites were referred to as 'Goorambat East' (located in the Goorambat region east of Broken Creek and the site of



the current Project) and 'Goorambat West' (located in the Stewarton and Major Plains regions west of Broken Creek). These studies sought to determine the optimal grid connection point for each site separately and for both sites together.

In June / July 2019, the feasibility studies determined that the Goorambat East site (the current Project) was financially viable on its own.

A development application for the Project was submitted to Benalla Rural City Council in August 2019 and was approved with a planning permit in December 2019.

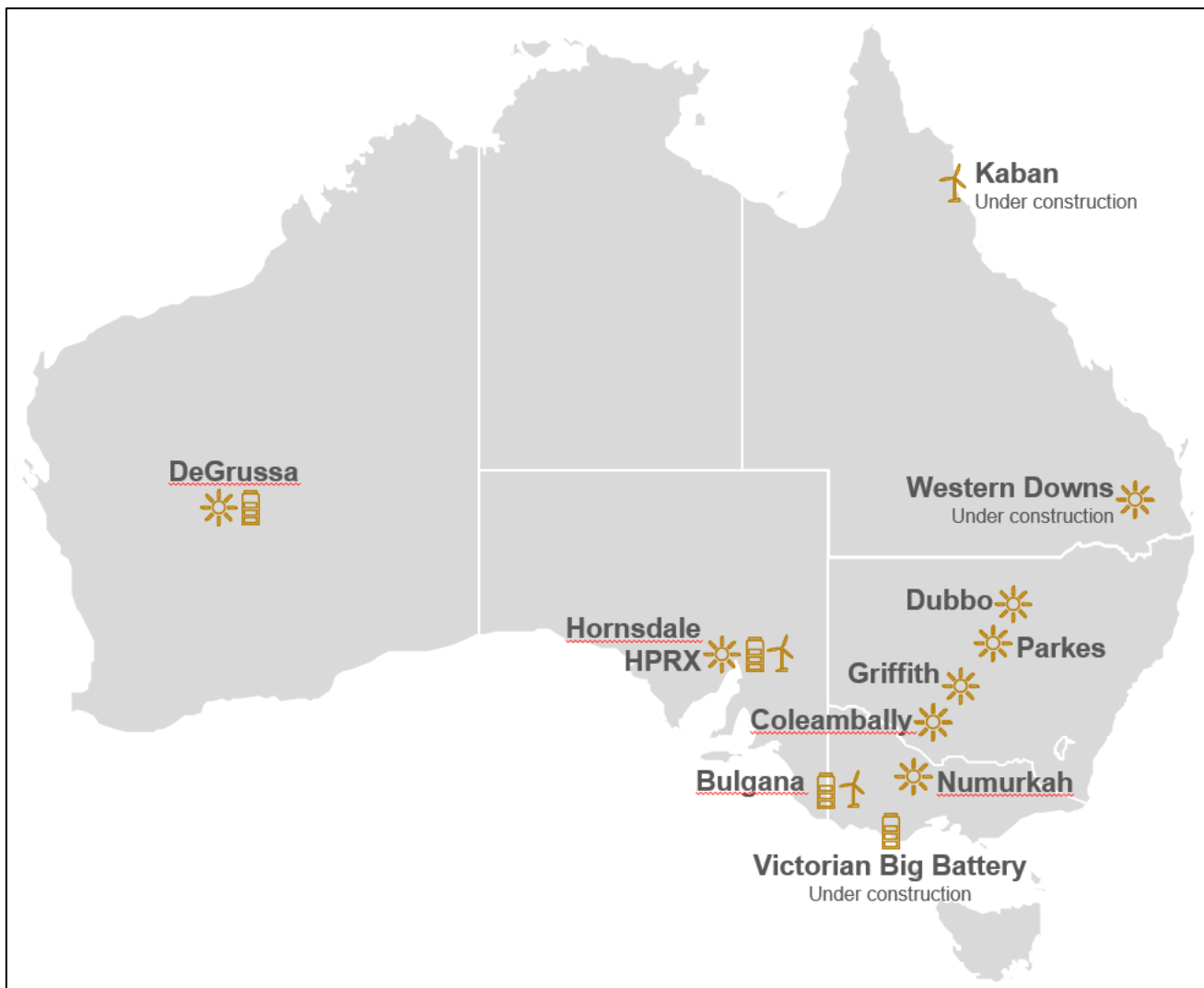


Figure 1-1 Neoen Renewable Energy Projects

## 1.2.2 Project description

The Project involves the construction and operation of a solar farm to supply electricity into the National Energy Market. The Project site is located approximately 12 km to the north of Benalla and approximately 500 m to the south of the Goorambat Township (refer Figure 1-2).

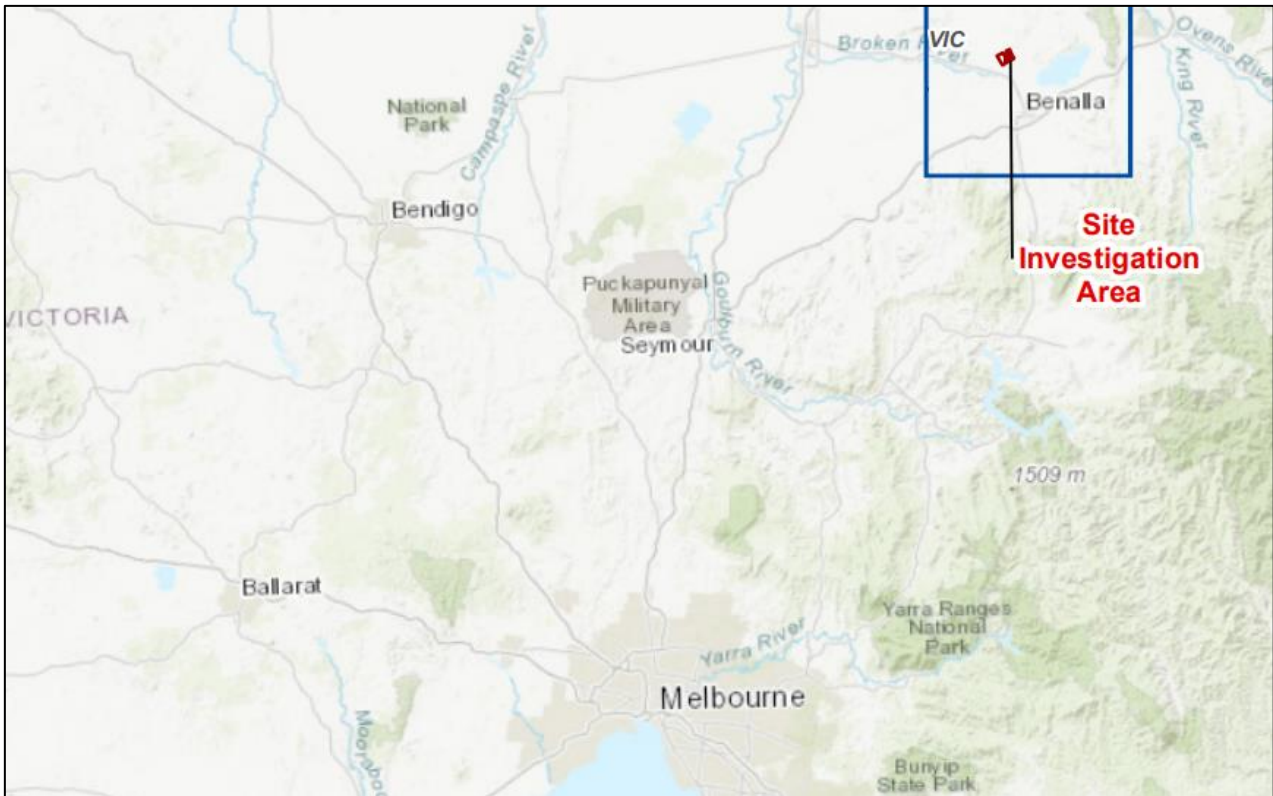


Figure 1-2 Project location

### 1.2.2.1 Infrastructure

The Project is expected to have a network capacity of up to 250 Megawatts (MW) provided by approximately 500,000 solar photovoltaic (PV) panels/modules and up to approximately 120 inverters. A range of associated infrastructure will also be required including:

- terminal substation
- connection to the electricity grid
- security features (including fencing)
- operations and maintenance areas
- site access and internal access roads
- landscaping (including vegetation screening)
- business identification signage.

It is proposed the Project will connect into the existing 220 kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line (i.e. the Shepparton Terminal Station to Dederang Terminal Station transmission line). This existing transmission line traverses the site from the northwest corner, extending east through the site. The Project will connect via the proposed terminal substation to this transmission line within the site.

### 1.2.2.2 Workforce

A construction workforce of approximately 200-250 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers would be required for the Project at peak construction. The construction workforce will consist of professional staff, engineers, electricians, mechanical trade workers, plant and machine operators and drivers, and concrete and rigger crews, all working at different periods through the construction phase.

The construction workforce is expected to be drawn from communities within Benalla LGA and surrounding LGAs of Wangaratta and Shepparton. Most construction workers will be sourced from communities within a one-hour radius of the site (in accordance with Neon’s definition of a safe driving distance under their Work Health and Safety (WHS) Policy), with potentially some specialists sourced from outside the immediate region (e.g.,

Melbourne). On this basis, a workforce accommodation facility is not proposed. Workers will be bussed to and from the Project site from major regional centres located within one hour driving distance.

During operations, a workforce of approximately 6-11 personnel is expected to undertake monitoring and maintenance of the Project infrastructure, as well as management of land on the Project site. The operational workforce is expected to be local residents within Goorambat or Benalla.

### 1.2.2.3 Timeframe

The Project is currently in the pre-construction phase. Construction for the Project will commence in early-2022 and is expected to be completed in 18 months.

The Project will operate for an approximate 30-year timeframe, after which it will either be re-powered or decommissioned and the land restored.

## 1.3 Alignment with VRET2 assessment requirements

As noted in Section 1.1, the SIA has been developed based on the requirements set out in the VRET2 Guide for Renewable Energy Developers (DELWP, 2021), as well as the framework for best practice social impact assessment outlined by the IAIA SIA Guidance Note (Vanclay et al., 2015). The applicable elements of both these Guidelines and the section that addresses the Guidelines in this Report are detailed in Table 1-1.

While there are synergies between the VRET2 Guide for Renewable Energy Developers and the IAIA Guidance Note (as seen in Table 1-1), the IAIA Guidance Note additionally recommends the design and implementation of a monitoring program to track the effectiveness of management measures and take corrective action, if necessary.

Table 1-1 SIA alignment with VRET2 Guide (required elements of a SIA) and IAIA SIA Guidance Note

VRET2 Guide for Renewable Energy Developers	IAIA SIA Guidance Note	Section addressed in Report
Community context and profile	Understand the issues	Section 3
Community map		Figure 1-2 Project location Figure 2-2 SIA study area Figure 3-5 Land holdings Figure 3-6 Surrounding context Figure 3-7 Location of sensitive receptors
Social impact stakeholder identification		A comprehensive list of stakeholders who may be impacted by the Project is outlined in the Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan.
Identify an evaluate impacts	Predict, analyse and assess the likely impacts	Section 4
Document measures to address/manage impacts	Develop and implement strategies	Section 5
-	Design and implement monitoring programs	Section 5.2

## 1.4 Structure of this report

The Report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 (this section) introduces the Project and outlines the purpose of this Report, including the alignment of the SIA with the VRET2 guidelines.
- Section 2 details the methodology applied to prepare the SIA.
- Section 3 outlines the current socio-economic context of the social study area.
- Section 4 identifies and assesses the social benefits and impacts of the Project.

- Section 5 presents proposed impact management and benefit enhancement measures.

## **1.5 Limitations and assumptions**

This report: has been prepared by GHD for NEOEN and may only be used and relied on by NEOEN for the purpose agreed between GHD and NEOEN as set out in Section 1.1 of this report.

GHD otherwise disclaims responsibility to any person other than NEOEN arising in connection with this report. GHD also excludes implied warranties and conditions, to the extent legally permissible.

The services undertaken by GHD in connection with preparing this report were limited to those specifically detailed in the report and are subject to the scope limitations set out in the report.

The opinions, conclusions and any recommendations in this report are based on conditions encountered and information reviewed at the date of preparation of the report. GHD has no responsibility or obligation to update this report to account for events or changes occurring subsequent to the date that the report was prepared.

The opinions, conclusions and any recommendations in this report are based on assumptions made by GHD described in this report (refer Sections 1.2.2 and 4 of this report). GHD disclaims liability arising from any of the assumptions being incorrect.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, consultation was undertaken by telephone/teleconferencing facilities and other research techniques (including site visit and observation) were not applied.

## 2. Methodology

This section presents the methodology used to identify, assess and analyse the potential social benefits and impacts of the Project, and develop the overall SIA.

### 2.1 The SIA process

Social impacts are defined as the consequences that people experience, either physically or perceptually, as a result of changes that affect the way they 'live, work, play, relate to one another, organise to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society' (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996, p. 59).

SIA is a process and tool to help identify, assess and manage the potential social impacts of project development, in advance of them occurring (Vanclay et al., 2015). The goal of SIA is ultimately to bring about better project outcomes that benefit both communities and proponent alike, not just the identification or amelioration of negative outcomes (Vanclay, 2003).

In line with this understanding, the SIA process was conducted over a three-month period commencing in August 2021. GHD conducted the SIA using a multi-staged process comprising three key stages: scoping, data collection, and impact identification and analysis. The activities involved in each of these stages are shown in Figure 2-1 and discussed below (Section 2.2 to Section 2.4).

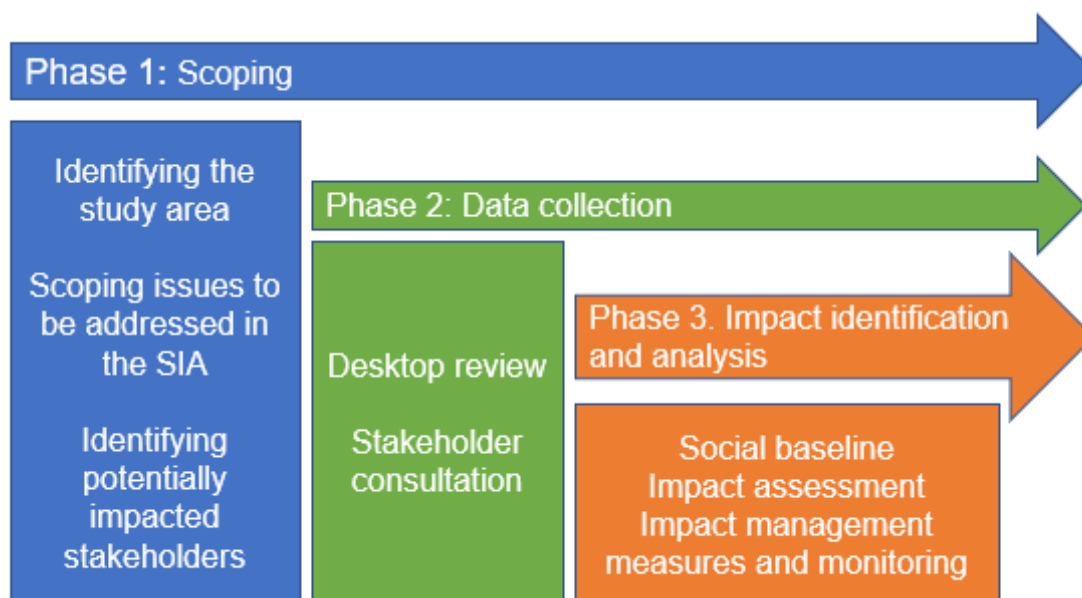


Figure 2-1 SIA methodology: phases and tasks

### 2.2 Phase 1: Scoping

The scoping phase involved:

- identifying the study area
- discussing and agreeing on scope of social issues for investigation
- identifying potentially impacted stakeholders to be involved in the SIA.

#### 2.2.1 Identifying the study area

As a preliminary task, a study area was defined to assist in understanding and describing the extent of impacts arising from the Project. In this SIA, the term 'study area' is used to refer to people and communities who live in similar geographic areas and who may experience qualitatively similar impacts (positive and negative) as a result

of the Project. The term 'community' is also used generically in the SIA to refer to a set of people who interact socially.

Figure 2-2 presents the three study areas adopted for the SIA. These are as follows:

- **The Project site:** this includes the area directly occupied by the Project infrastructure, namely the 500,000 solar PV panels/modules.
- **The local study area:** this includes the community of Goorambat, which is the nearest community to the Project and accordingly where there is likely potential for impacts related to environmental amenity of the town (such as noise) and visual character.
- **The regional study area:** This includes the local government area (LGA) of Benalla, where the Project site is located. It includes the town of Benalla, which may potentially supply goods and services, community infrastructure facilities and construction workforce to the Project.

The broader socio-economic context for the project includes the LGAs of Wangaratta Rural City Council and City of Greater Shepparton. These are discussed where relevant, given their likely potential as a source of construction workforce and the location of the closest major regional centres (Wangaratta and Shepparton) to the Project site.

Taken together, these three areas comprise the overall SIA study area of the Project. The equivalent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census statistical areas used in this report for baseline data reporting are listed in Table 2-1.

**Table 2-1** Study area statistical geographies

Census name	Abbreviation	Description
Goorambat State Suburb (SSC)	Goorambat	This area covers the extent of the urban area of Goorambat. This is the most common geography used to represent Goorambat in this report.
Benalla Local Government Area	Benalla LGA	The LGA statistical area covers the Benalla Rural City's extent.
Shepparton Local Government Area	Shepparton LGA	The LGA statistical area covers the City of Greater Shepparton's extent.
Wangaratta Local Government Area	Wangaratta LGA	The LGA statistical area covers the Rural City of Wangaratta's extent.

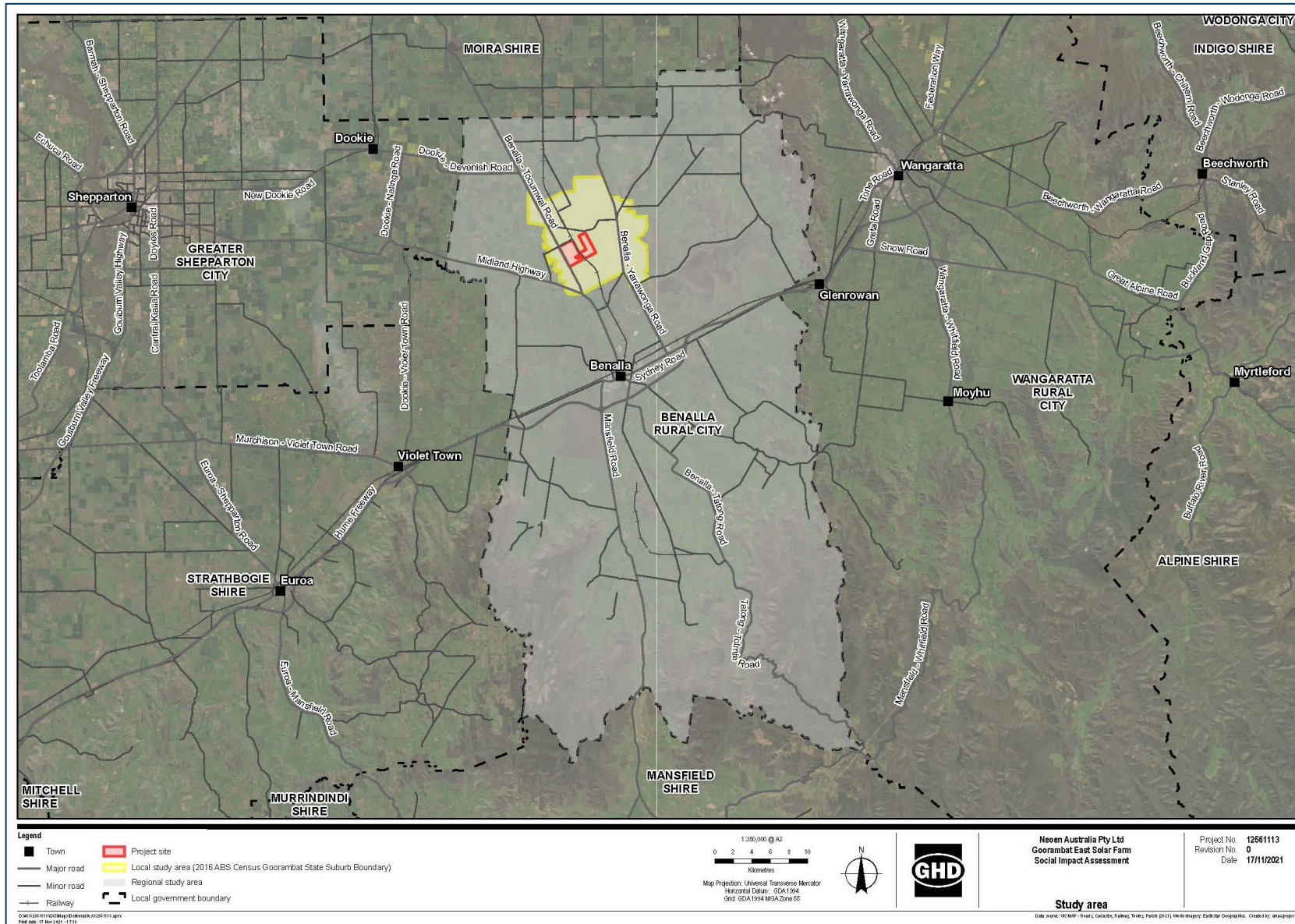


Figure 2-2 SIA study area

## 2.2.2 Scoping of social issues for investigation

A key task of phase 1 of the SIA was to understand and scope relevant 'components of the social environment' that could be directly or indirectly affected by the Project (Barnett and Casper, 2001).

The purpose of this task was to:

- inform the scope of the social baseline
- establish an early understanding of the extent of potential socio-economic impacts and benefits (proportionate to the nature and scale of the Project)
- assist in identifying stakeholders to be consulted for the SIA.

A number of components of the social environment for consideration were identified based on the list of social changes commonly associated with renewable energy projects identified in the VRET Guide for Renewable Energy Developers as well as from broader literature (Roddis et al., 2020; Fraser and Chapman, 2018).

These aspects and the potential for changes to them as a result of the Project were then validated and further defined during a scoping workshop conducted between Neoen and the GHD Project teams. The workshop drew on the issues, concerns and benefits identified to date through Neoen's consultation process and the collective teams' experience of working on similar projects.

A summary of social elements scoped for investigation as part of this SIA and the rationale for their inclusion is outlined in Table 2-2. Components of the social environment that were also considered but ultimately determined as not relevant/unlikely to be impacted by the Project are also described. The structure of the SIA (i.e. the baseline and impact assessment) reflects the identified elements of the social environment in the sections which follow.

**Table 2-2 Scoping of social elements**

Component of the social environment	Included for investigation	Rationale	Addressed in this report under following section
Suggested social elements for investigation by VRET Guide for Renewable Energy Developers:			
Community quality and way of life (including cohesion)	✓	Construction and operation of Project may expose host landholders and surrounding local community to amenity changes, affecting 'rural way of life' and other valued aspects of the social environment.	Community health and wellbeing
Local culture, heritage, and ability to access cultural resources	Partially	The site does not contain any registered heritage or Aboriginal cultural heritage values. The Project could enable investment in broader cultural resources important to local and regional communities.	Access to community infrastructure, facilities and services (i.e. arts and culture) Community health and wellbeing
Community access to, and quality of, infrastructure, services and facilities	✓	The Project employees may increase demand on health, police and emergency services.	Access to community infrastructure, facilities and services
Community safety, physical and mental health and wellbeing	✓	Potential for perceptions of reduced safety and social cohesion within the local community associated with the presence of 'non-local' workforces.	Community health and wellbeing
Livelihoods and economic prospects	✓	The Project could enable direct / indirect employment as well as increased income for host landholders.	Livelihoods, employment and economy
Social values associated with natural and built assets	✓	'See 'community quality and way of life' (above).	Community health and wellbeing



Component of the social environment	Included for investigation	Rationale	Addressed in this report under following section
Other social elements:			
Population and demographics	✓	Potential for workforce / employment opportunities to result in changes to regional population.	Population and demographics
Housing and accommodation	✓	Potential for Project workforce to contribute to local housing / accommodation pressures.	Housing and accommodation
Access and connectivity	✓	Potential for Project construction to disrupt residents' ability to connect to work, services and social activities through construction activities.	Access and connectivity

## 2.2.3 Identifying potentially impacted stakeholders

Based on the initial scoping of issues, a range of stakeholders that could potentially be impacted by the Project were identified. The overall intent was to invite a representative range of stakeholder groups to participate in SIA consultation.

Potentially impacted stakeholders were mapped according to the level of potential impact they would likely experience and were organised according to seven stakeholder groups: host landholders, neighbours, local government, state and/or federal members of parliament, businesses, community infrastructure and service providers, and community organisations.

A list of stakeholders consulted for the SIA is included in Section 2.3.2.

## 2.3 Phase 2: Data collection

Phase 2 of the SIA involved:

- desktop research
- stakeholder consultation.

### 2.3.1 Desktop review

A desktop review of available literature and relevant data was undertaken to gain an understanding of the local and regional context. Data sources examined included:

- various completed studies commissioned by Neoen as part of the development application for the Project, including the town planning report, traffic study, glare and glint assessment, agricultural assessment and cultural heritage study
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, including Census 2016 data
- academic literature on solar farm developments and their potential social impact
- reports published by Benalla Rural City Council and the Victorian Government.

The information reviewed has informed the development of the socio-economic baseline, assessment of socio-economic impacts, and development of management measures (Section 2.4).

The review also assisted with the preparation of stakeholder engagement materials, including the identification of interview questions and survey questions (section 2.3.2).

All documents reviewed are listed in the reference list in Section 6 of this report.

## 2.3.2 Stakeholder consultation

Stakeholder consultation was integrated into the SIA process in accordance with best practice and the VRET Guide for Renewable Energy Developers Guide, which encourages community member participation in the SIA process. The objectives of stakeholder consultation were to:

- ensure the interests and concerns of stakeholders who may be impacted (positively and negatively) by the project were meaningfully considered
- provide opportunities for local stakeholder input to the social baseline and development of management strategies (including benefit sharing opportunities)
- ensure that the assessment and evaluation of impacts was informed by the knowledge and experience of local stakeholders.

The SIA consultation was undertaken between 1 October 2021 and 29 October 2021. One-on-one interviews were undertaken with host landholders, neighbours, local government, state and/or federal members of parliament, businesses, community infrastructure and service providers, and community organisations. For reporting purposes and to protect the anonymity of interviewees quoted throughout the Report, the names of individual interviewees are not provided (only their broad organisational affiliation is mentioned, where relevant).

Interviews were semi-structured in nature and a flexible interview protocol was prepared to guide the conversation. Interview questions related to the characteristics and values of the study area, the availability and capacity of services and facilities, anticipated social impacts as well as priorities for mitigation and benefit sharing.

Given the need to adopt COVID-19 considerations required to protect remote communities at the time this study was undertaken, interviews were held via telephone or through online conferencing facilities. Outcomes of the consultation are included in relevant sections of the Report.

A list of stakeholders consulted for the SIA and a summary of key themes raised by the stakeholders is provided in Table 2-3.

**Table 2-3 Stakeholders consulted for SIA**

Stakeholder	Key theme
Host landholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Selection of Neoen (refer to Section 1.2.1)</li> <li>– Pride in being a 'farmer-led' project</li> <li>– Enhanced economic prosperity through additional income ('drought proofing' farms)</li> <li>– Project payments to ensure a greater likelihood of farm succession</li> <li>– Improved farm viability and ability to 'put back into the local economy'</li> <li>– Continuity of productive agricultural land on property (even with panels)</li> <li>– Establishment of Project Community Fund (perceived as key broader benefit)</li> <li>– Management of impacts to properties during construction</li> <li>– Recognised that visual amenity is a concern to broader community.</li> </ul>
Neighbouring landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need for ongoing / regular communication on Project progress</li> <li>– Visual impacts / cumulative loss of rural landscape amenity</li> <li>– Decrease in property amenity from construction noise, light and dust</li> <li>– Electromagnetic radiation and interference to interrupt animal welfare</li> <li>– Radiant heat from solar panels and impact on residential amenity</li> <li>– Decrease in house prices and land values</li> <li>– Compensation from construction impacts</li> <li>– Ongoing maintenance of landscaping.</li> </ul>
State/Federal Members of Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Opportunities for Benalla LGA through transition to renewable economies / growth in manufacturing and health industries</li> <li>– Implications of COVID-19 / resilience of regional economy</li> <li>– Limitations in telecommunications / internet services and its implications for regional development</li> <li>– High demand for accommodation affecting housing availability and affordability</li> </ul>

Stakeholder	Key theme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Community wellbeing (high suicide rate, youth employment)</li> <li>– Ensuring that the local community benefits from employment and business opportunities from the Project</li> <li>– ‘Skills divide’ – imbalance in jobs available from project / residents with skills</li> <li>– Visual impacts a concern among community</li> <li>– Implications of Project to agricultural land productivity / landscape amenity</li> <li>– Ensuring local community continues to benefit through project operation phase</li> <li>– Project to support local skills training / partnerships / legacy community investments.</li> </ul>
Local government (Benalla Rural City Council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concerns around cumulative loss of productive farmland</li> <li>– Increasing overall demand for housing</li> <li>– Impacts of COVID-19 and resilience of local economy</li> <li>– Ensuring local community benefits through employment and supply opportunities, and through legacy values</li> <li>– Opportunities to support local clubs and other initiatives.</li> </ul>
Local businesses (Diggers Wife Café, Goorambat Post Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Character / identity / aspirations of Goorambat community</li> <li>– Visual amenity impacts</li> <li>– Construction traffic impacts on road network and traffic safety</li> <li>– Decrease in property prices and land values</li> <li>– Construction impacts on business viability (both positive and negative)</li> <li>– Current low unemployment / competition for labour</li> <li>– Opportunities for local business to supply Project</li> <li>– Sponsorship / funding opportunities.</li> </ul>
Goorambat Country Fire Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adequate capacity of fire services to address demand</li> <li>– Ageing volunteer workforce – opportunities for volunteering from Project workforce</li> <li>– Sponsorship / funding opportunities</li> <li>– Need for ongoing engagement with the Project regarding emergency response.</li> </ul>
Goorambat and District Community Group Inc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Character / identity / aspirations of Goorambat community</li> <li>– Concerns around housing availability and affordability</li> <li>– Construction traffic management</li> <li>– Ensuring local community benefits through legacy / community investments.</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Phase 3: Impact assessment

### 2.4.1 Social baseline

A baseline of the current socio-economic context was established for the social study area. This context was used as the basis for understanding potential impacts of the project and a baseline against which impacts can be measured. The information for the baseline was established through a review of publicly available information (refer to Section 2.3.1), Google images, and the findings of stakeholder consultation.

The social baseline was tailored to describe the social values, characteristics and potential community infrastructure and services that are likely to be impacted by the Project, based on the initial scoping of relevant social elements described in Section 2.2.2.

### 2.4.2 Impact identification and assessment

Impact assessment involved considering how the changes brought about by the construction and operation of the Project may affect the baseline socio-economic conditions of the study areas. These impacts may be direct, indirect or cumulative in nature, as well as positive or negative.

Potential social impacts were identified and assessed using a data triangulation process. This means that information used to ascertain an impact was collected from multiple sources, including:

- The Project description
- The outcomes of consultation
- The findings of the socio-economic baseline.

Potential social impacts were organised according to the social elements described in Section 2.2.2. The purpose of categorisation is to provide a structure to the impact assessment. The categories are not intended to be rigid or mutually exclusive – some impacts fall within multiple categories, in which case they are grouped within the most relevant category.

An assessment of the identified social impacts was then undertaken to determine their likely level of ‘significance’. Significance was determined by considering the likelihood of an impact occurring (Table 2-4), and the anticipated (most likely) consequence of the impact if it were to occur (Table 2-5). The overall level of significance was determined by combining the likelihood and consequence criteria as shown in Table 2-6.

**Table 2-4 Likelihood criteria**

Scale	Definition
Almost certain	The impact is expected to occur in most circumstances. The impact has occurred in almost all instances when similar activities are undertaken in similar environments.
Likely	The probability of the occurrence is high and is expected to occur in many circumstances. The impact has occurred in most instances when similar activities are undertaken in similar environments.
Possible	The impact could occur. The impact has not consistently occurred when similar activities have been undertaken in similar environments.
Unlikely	The probability of the occurrence is low. The impact has occurred in a small number of instances when similar activities are undertaken, however the environment was materially different to the one under consideration.
Rare	The impact may only occur in exceptional circumstances. The impact has occurred in a limited number of instances when similar activities are undertaken, however the environment was materially different to the one under consideration.

**Table 2-5 Consequence criteria**

Scale	Description (negative impact)	Description (positive impact)
Minimal	Marginal change from the existing socio-economic conditions that is very short term in nature. No adaptation or recovery required for those affected. Those affected could be expected to easily adapt or cope.	A small enhancement of social wellbeing for some individuals in the study area.
Minor	A small but measurable change from the existing socio-economic conditions. Changes are expected to be temporary and may affect a small catchment (i.e. an individual or one group of stakeholders) within the study area. Quick functional recovery expected within a few months and those affected could be expected to easily adapt or cope.	Enhancement of social wellbeing having a small but appreciable positive effect on individual or community well-being in the study area.
Moderate	Noticeable and relatively substantial change from the existing socio-economic conditions. Changes may be temporary and affect several individuals or groups of stakeholders within the study area. A functional recovery is expected within 1-2 years or sooner and those affected could be expected to have some capacity to adapt or cope with the change and some modification/adjustment to way of life would be required.	Substantial enhancement social wellbeing for an individual or group of stakeholders within the study area.
Major	A substantial and severe change from the existing socio-economic conditions. Changes may be longer term, or temporary, and affect a substantial number of stakeholder groups (but not necessarily the majority) within the study area. A functional recovery is expected within 5 years or sooner. Those affected could be	Extensive and long-term enhancement of social wellbeing for a substantial number of stakeholder groups (but not necessarily a majority) within the study area.

Scale	Description (negative impact)	Description (positive impact)
	expected to have limited capacity to adapt or cope with the change and notable modification/adjustment to way of life would be required.	
Extreme	A change fundamentally altering the existing socio-economic conditions and affecting all stakeholder groups with the study area or greater area. A functional recovery is expected within 5 to 10 years, if at all and those affected could be expected to have little or no capacity to adapt or cope with the change, leading to a compromise to the community's way of life.	Extensive and long-term enhancement of social wellbeing for all stakeholder groups within the study area or greater area.

Table 2-6 Impact rating scale

Likelihood	Consequence				
	Minimal	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Almost Certain	Medium	Medium	High	Very high	Very high
Likely	Low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Possible	Low	Low	Medium	High	High
Unlikely	Negligible	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Rare	Negligible	Negligible	Low	Medium	High

### 2.4.3 Impact management measures

Following the identification of impacts, measures were developed to enhance the positive impacts of the Project and to avoid, mitigate or manage negative impacts (collectively referred to as 'management measures'). Management measures were developed based on the findings of:

- stakeholder consultation
- the assessment of potential socio-economic issues
- proposed Neoen benefit and impact management measures and programs
- discussion with Neoen personnel
- the knowledge of the SIA study team in developing and implementing management frameworks.

Management measures are outlined in Section 5.

### 2.4.4 Assessment of residual significance

Following the identification of management measures, the impact assessment was re-assessed (assuming effective implementation of the proposed management measures) to arrive at the residual significance of the impact. Comparing the initial impact assessment with the residual impact assessment, indicates the effect of the management measures in reducing adverse impacts and enhancing positive impacts.

## 3. Social baseline

This section outlines the existing community context and socio-economic environment of the social study area for the Project.

### 3.1 Project site and surrounds

#### 3.1.1 Land subject to the project

The Project is situated approximately 215 km northeast of Melbourne within the Benalla LGA, forming part of the Hume Region in North-East Victoria. The site is located approximately 12 km to the north of Benalla and approximately 500 m to the south of the Goorambat Township (Figure 1-2).

The Project is located at 379 Goorambat-Chesney Road, Goorambat, on the following land parcels (Figure 3-5):

- Lot 1 and 2 TP399580
- Lot 1 and 2 TP179662
- Lot 1 TP161528
- Allotment 39B Parish of Goorambat
- Allotment 41 Parish of Goorambat
- Allotment 59A Parish of Goorambat
- An unused Government Road within the project boundary.

The site has a total area of 630 hectares and is bound by Goorambat-Thoona Road to the north-west, Hooper Road to the north-east, agricultural land and dwellings to the south-east, and Benalla-Tocumwal Road to the south-west (Figure 3-6). The Benalla to Oaklands railway line traverses the site extending south-east to north-west towards the Goorambat Township. Goorambat-Chesney Road extends south from the Goorambat Township and runs adjacent to the railway line. Spinks Lane extends east from Goorambat-Chesney Road.

The site is primarily accessed at Goorambat-Chesney Road, Spinks Lane and Saunders Road.

The properties on which the project is proposed are large rural land holdings currently utilised for agricultural purposes, including cropping and livestock grazing, and have been largely cleared with a few scattered trees remaining (AECOM, 2020). The land is relatively flat with topography rising gently to the north-east of the site.

There is minimal farming infrastructure located within the site aside from several sheds located towards the north-east corner of the site and fencing. There is no irrigation supply infrastructure within the Project site.

There is one owner-occupied dwelling on Lot 1 TP161528 (Figure 3-7). The remaining landholders live in residence on properties nearby to the site. The majority of the property owners are long-term residents of the Benalla District with the properties having been in the families for multiple generations. The owner of the dwelling on the project site is a descendent of the original European settlers of the area.

Through SIA consultation and Neoen's own engagement with the landholders, it is noted that they value the rural amenity and privacy of where they live. The location of the Project site on the properties have been identified in consultation with the landholders in parts of the property that are not actively used to carry out agricultural activities.

#### 3.1.2 Surrounding properties

As shown in Figure 3-1 - Figure 3-4, the immediate surrounding area consists of land used for agricultural purposes with associated residential dwellings and farming infrastructure, as well as areas of dispersed bushland.

Broadacre cropping is the main land use occurring on the adjoining properties, with hay and grain being important enterprises (AECOM, 2020). There are also grazing and animal husbandry activities, consisting of wool, beef and lamb production (AECOM, 2020). The property located to the south of the Project site hosts a racehorse thoroughbred training and breeding business, with approximately 30 horses located on the property.

There is no irrigation supply infrastructure on any of the neighbouring properties (AECOM, 2020).

Figure 3-7 illustrates the location of dwellings immediately surrounding the site and those located within Goorambat Township, located approximately 500 m to the north of the site. As shown, there are fourteen dwellings within a 500 metres radius of the Project site.

SIA consultation with a selected number of adjoining landholders identified that they - similar to host landholders - value the rural amenity of the local area, which they described as being characterised by 'picturesque' vistas across agricultural land and areas of natural bushland. They also valued the peaceful and quiet environment and described the ability to live on 'acreage' in relatively close proximity to the regional service hub of Benalla as key reasons attracting them to the area.

Figure 3-1 - Figure 3-7 illustrates the site and surrounding locality.



Figure 3-1 Project site - 1



Figure 3-2 Project site - 2



Figure 3-3 Level-crossing on Spinks Lane



Figure 3-4 Goorambat-Chesney Road and Spinks Lane intersection

Source: (AECOM, 2020)



Figure 3-5 Land holdings  
 Source: (AECOM, 2020)



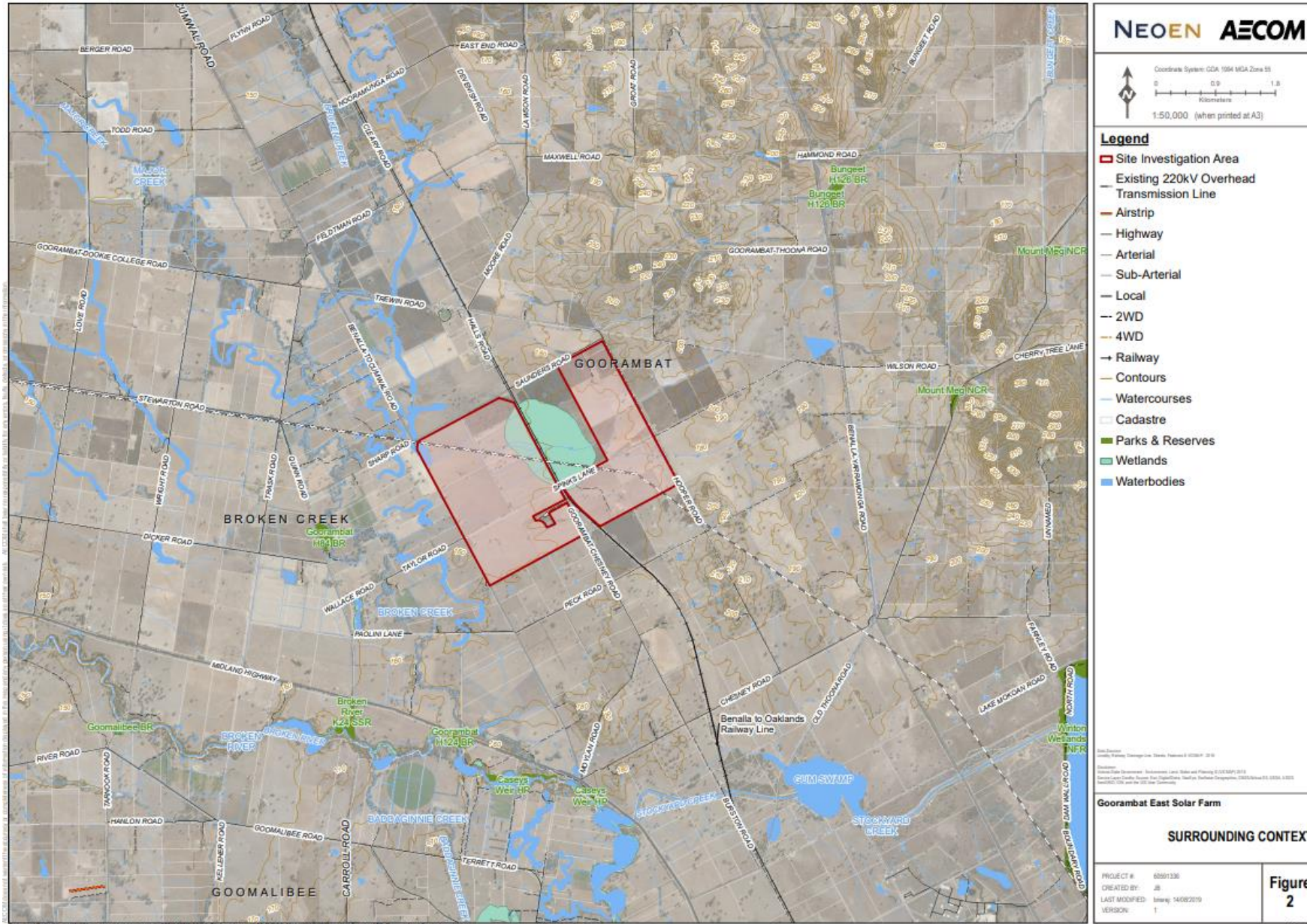


Figure 3-6 Surrounding context  
 Source: (AECOM, 2020)

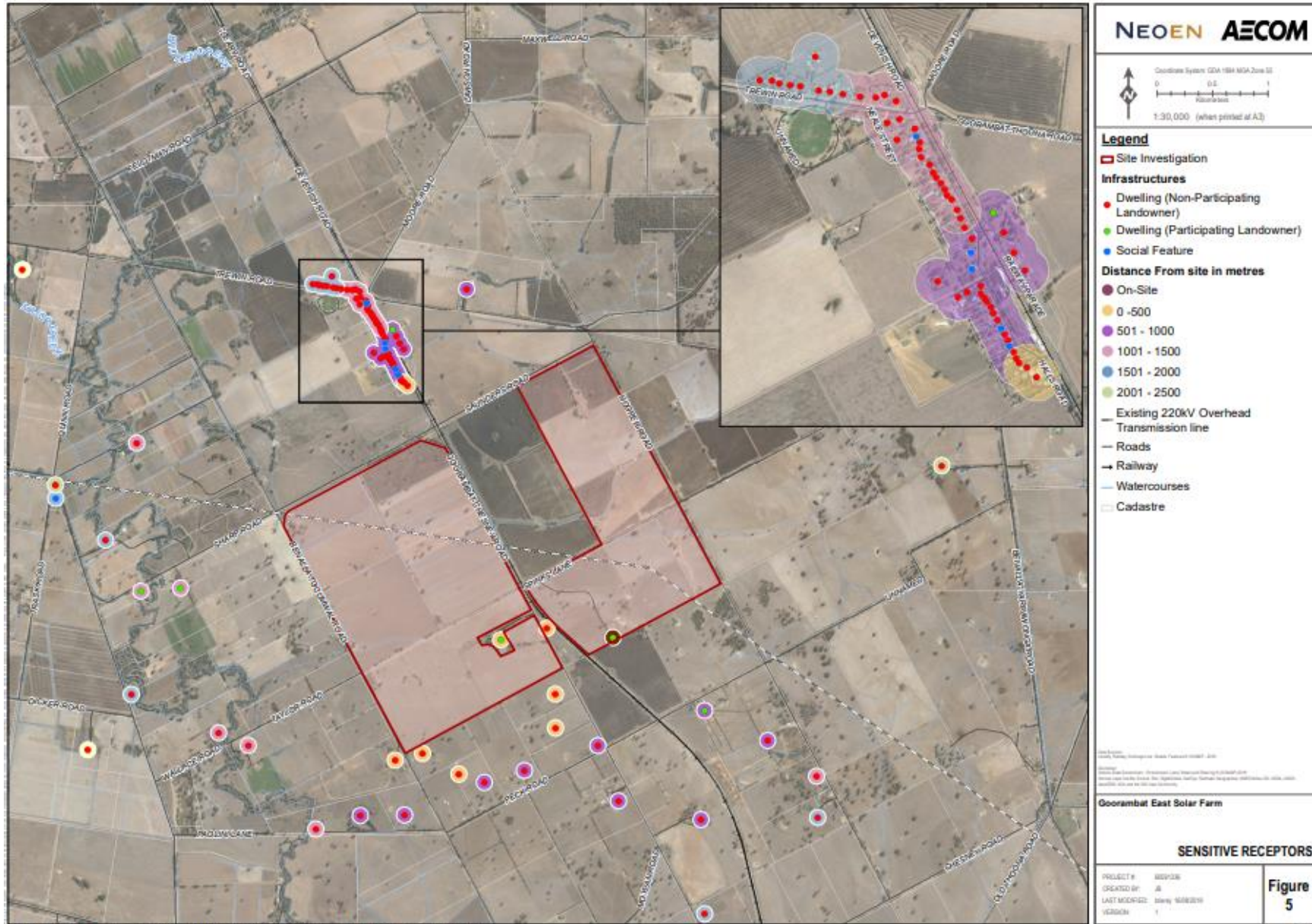


Figure 3-7 Location of sensitive receptors  
 Source: (AECOM, 2020)

## 3.2 Local and regional study area

Goorambat is a small yet vibrant community in north-east Victoria. The town is located in the Rural City of Benalla LGA, approximately 17 km north of Benalla and 229 km north of the state capital of Melbourne. The town lies along Halls Road and is accessed either via Goorambat-Thoona Road or Saunders Road from the main road route, Benalla-Tocumwal Road, which lies to the east.

### 3.2.1 Population and demographics

At the time of the 2016 Census, Goorambat had a population of 297 people, representing 2.1% of the Benalla LGA (13,861 person) (Table 3-1). The number of persons in Goorambat who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is relatively small, representing just 2.0% of the population (6 persons), compared to Benalla LGA (1.6%) and Victoria (0.8%).

**Table 3-1** Census population data, local and regional study areas, 2016

Metric	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Victoria
Population <sup>1</sup>	297	13,861	5,926,624
Male	50.3%	48.4%	49.1%
Female	49.7%	51.6%	50.9%
Sex ratio	1.0	0.9	1.0
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	6 persons (2.0%)	1.6%	0.8%

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

<sup>1</sup> Based on place of usual residence on Census night

Similar to other parts of regional Victoria experiencing population decline (Foster et al., 2021), the population of Goorambat declined by 56 persons (-15.9%) between 2011 – 2016.

At the regional level, the population of Benalla LGA increased during the 10-year period from 2010-2020, with an average annual growth rate of 0.2% and a total population change of 2.2%. This population growth is minimal, however, compared to the nearby LGAs of Shepparton and Wangaratta, which experienced 9.2% and 7.3% population growth between 2010 and 2020, respectively (Table 3-2).

**Table 3-2** Estimated resident population, regional study areas, 2010-2020

Area	2010-2020 population change	2010-2020 average annual growth rate
Benalla	2.2%	0.2%
Shepparton	9.2%	1.0%
Wangaratta	7.3%	0.8%

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

The population of Goorambat and Benalla LGA are also ageing at a higher rate compared to the rest of Victoria. As shown in Table 3-3, Goorambat had a median age of 47 years in 2016, which is generally in line with the median age of the broader Benalla LGA (49 years), but higher compared to the median age of 37 years for Victoria. Further, approximately 21.9% of the Goorambat population was aged over 65 years in 2016, while only 15.6% of the population of Victoria was aged over 65.

Within Benalla LGA more broadly, there is an under-representation of young persons aged 18 to 34 years (15.4%) compared to Victoria (24.5%), reflecting an ongoing recognised challenge of retaining and promoting opportunities for young people living in Benalla Rural City (BRCC, 2016).

Table 3-3 Age profile, 2016

Age profile	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Victoria
0-4 years	5.4%	4.9%	6.3%
5 to 11 years	12.1%	7.5%	8.6%
12 to 17 years	5.1%	7.0%	6.9%
18 to 24 years	7.1%	6.7%	9.5%
25 to 34 years	8.4%	8.7%	15.0%
35 to 49 years	18.2%	15.6%	20.4%
50 to 64 years	22.9%	23.6%	17.8%
65 to 74 years	12.1%	14.4%	8.6%
75 to 84 years	8.8%	7.9%	4.8%
85+ years	1.0%	3.8%	2.2%
Median age	47	49	37

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

## 3.2.2 Livelihoods, employment and economy

### 3.2.2.1 Labour force characteristics

The available labour force in Goorambat is very small. According to ABS Census data, there were 147 people who were in the labour force in 2016. Of these, 57.1% were employed full time, 32.0% were employed part-time and 2.7% were unemployed. The overall labour force participation rate was 60.6% (Table 3-4).

Table 3-4 Labour force and unemployment rate, June 2021

Indicator	Labour force (persons)	Labour force participation rate <sup>2</sup>	Unemployed persons	Unemployment rate	12-month unemployment rate change
Goorambat <sup>1</sup>	147	60.6%	4	-	N/A
Benalla LGA	4984	51.1%	230	4.6	-0.4%
Shepparton	30,626	56.4%	1,770	5.8	-0.4%
Wangaratta	15,932	57.0%	573	3.6	0.0%
Victoria	3,578,600	60.5%	220,700	6.2	0.8%

Source: National Skills Commission, 2021; <sup>1</sup> ABS 2016 Census, Census QuickStats; <sup>2</sup> ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing, Labour force participation rate for working age population (15 – 64 years).

At the regional level, recent data from the Australian Government’s Small Area Labour Markets (SLAM) quarterly regional estimates (National Skills Commission, 2021) indicate the labour force participation rates for Benalla LGA (51.1%) and the surrounding LGAs of Shepparton (56.4%) and Wangaratta (57.0%) are below that of the state average (Table 3-4). However, unemployment within all three LGAs is also lower than the state average of 6.2%.

Over the 12 months to June 2021, the unemployment rate in both Benalla and Wangaratta LGAs declined to a low of 3.6% and 3.1%, while unemployment in Shepparton fluctuated to a high of 7.6% (Figure 3-8). The unemployment rate in both Benalla LGA and Wangaratta LGA have remained consistently lower than that of the State since late 2019, reflecting the anecdotally current tight labour market characteristics of the regional study area.

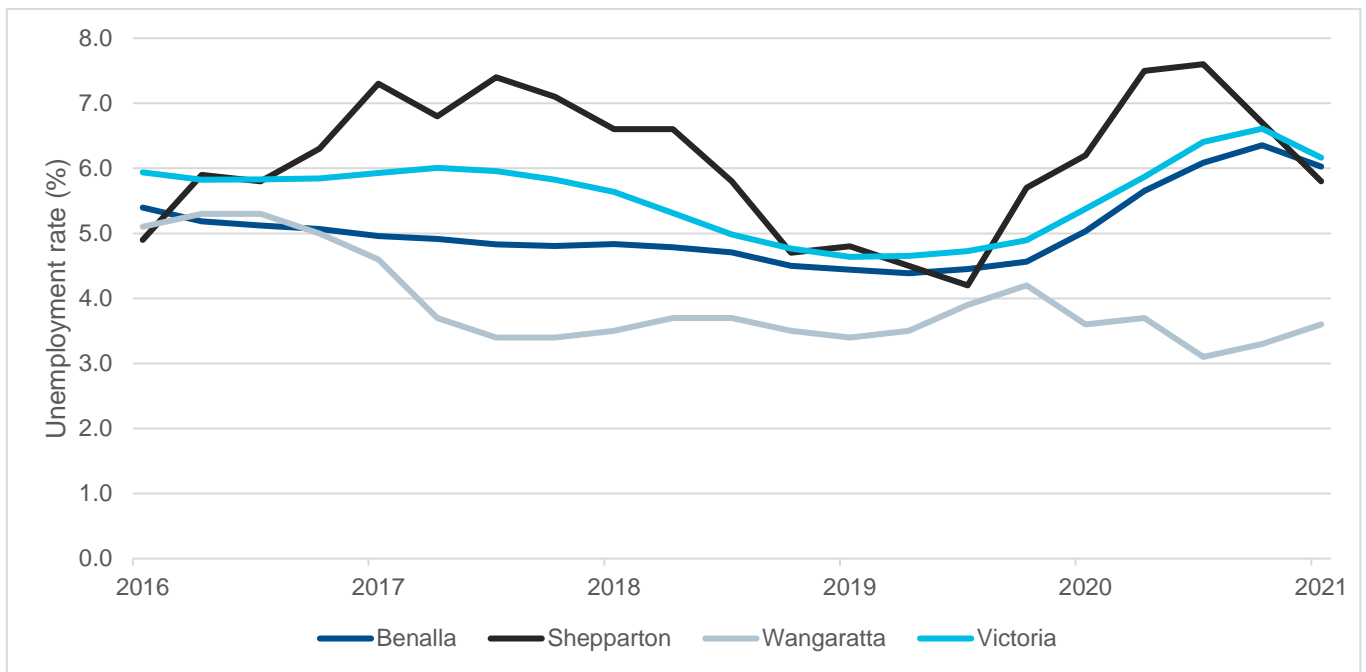


Figure 3-8 Unemployment rate, regional study area, 2016

Source: Australian Government (2021) Small area labour markets publication.

### 3.2.2.2 Industry and occupation of employment

Figure 3-9 shows the top industries of employment for Goorambat compared to the regional study areas and Victoria. The economy of Goorambat is founded primarily on wheat and sheep farming, with the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry being the main industry of employment in Goorambat in 2016 (18.8%).

In contrast, the main industries of employment in Benalla LGA are health care and social assistance (14.3%), retail trade (9.0%) and manufacturing (8.8%). This is consistent with other regional centres in the area including Shepparton and Wangaratta. Large employers in the region currently include Thales Australia (defence), D & R Henderson Pty Ltd (timber products), Schneider Electric (Australia) Pty Ltd (energy management and automation), and a wide variety of smaller manufacturing businesses. The establishment in 2018 of the LS Concrete Precast Facility in Benalla to support development of the West Fate Tunnel Project in Melbourne is a further major driver of manufacturing employment in the region, reportedly employing more than 300 people.

In 2016, the construction workforce in the SIA study area as a whole was equal to 3,579 workers, of whom 8.4% live in Benalla LGA, 8.0% in Shepparton LGA and 7.4% in Wangaratta LGA. This indicates there is a relative availability of construction workers in the local and regional study area upon which the Project could potentially draw.

Industry	Goorambat	Benalla	Shapparton	Wangaratta	Victoria
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	18.8%		9.8%	8.3%	2.2%
Manufacturing	9.0%		8.8%	10.0%	7.8%
Construction	6.8%		8.4%	8.0%	8.3%
Retail Trade	4.5%		9.0%	11.1%	10.2%
Accommodation and Food Services	9.8%		6.8%	5.5%	6.6%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	4.5%		4.5%	4.0%	4.8%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	3.8%		2.9%	4.0%	7.9%
Public Administration and Safety	5.3%		6.3%	4.3%	5.3%
Education and Training	6.8%		8.2%	8.1%	8.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	10.5%		14.3%	15.2%	12.5%

Figure 3-9 Industry of employment, 2016

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

SIA consultation with local stakeholders provided anecdotal evidence that there is a growing tourism industry in Goorambat associated with the Goorambat Silo Art and the street art located in the Goorambat Uniting Church. According to one local business owner, there has been an increase of '55,000 additional vehicle movements per year' along the main street of Goorambat following completion of the silo art (SIA consultation, 2021). The Benalla Rural City Council seeks to promote its strong tourism and arts industry as a key diversifying factor in the local

council's economy (BRCC, 2016). However, accommodation availability was cited during consultation as a challenge to further development of these industries (refer to Section 3.2.3).

### 3.2.2.3 Income

According to the 2016 Census, both individuals and households within the local and regional study areas earn lower median weekly incomes compared to the broader Victorian population (Table 3-5). This is consistent with a recognised national trend whereby people in rural and remote areas generally have lower incomes than compared with people living in metropolitan areas (AIHW, 2019). Poorer income outcomes in the local and regional study area may be due to multiple factors including a level of disadvantage related to education and employment opportunities and reflects the overall level of disadvantage experienced by persons in this region (Section 3.2.6.4).

**Table 3-5** Median weekly and personal income, 2016

Metric	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Shepparton	Wangaratta	Victoria
Median personal weekly income	\$579	\$537	\$588	\$595	\$644
Median household weekly income	\$1,272	\$946	\$1,163	\$1,085	\$1,419

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

### 3.2.2.4 Skills and training

At the time of the 2016 census, 32.5% of residents in Goorambat had completed year 12 as the highest level of educational attainment, compared to 35.6% in the Benalla LGA, and 56.5% in Victoria (Table 3-6). Goorambat had a higher proportion of residents who had achieved a certificate level as their highest level of educational attainment at 46.4%, compared to Victoria (28.0%). This is similar to the broader Benalla LGA, where 40.1% of the population had achieved a certificate level as their highest level of education.

**Table 3-6** Education attainment, 2016

Metric	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Shepparton	Wangaratta	Victoria
Completed year 12 (or equivalent)	32.5%	35.6%	37.6%	38.6%	56.5%
Bachelor's degree level and above	15.2%	20.4%	23.1%	24.3%	40.2%
Advanced diploma and diploma	18.8%	16.0%	14.7%	15.9%	15.3%
Certificate level	46.4%	40.1%	37.7%	38.6%	28.0%

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

Stakeholder consultation indicated that ongoing skill shortages, particularly around youth employment and regional retention, is a key issue in Benalla LGA and broader regional study areas. According to census data for Benalla, Shepparton and Wangaratta LGAs, all residents in the labour force in 2016 with relevant skills for the Project (such as managers, engineers, technicians and trades workers, machinery operators and labourers) were fully employed (Table 3-7).

**Table 3-7** Skill shortages, 2016

Metric	Benalla LGA		Shepparton LGA		Wangaratta LGA	
	Employed	Unemployed looking for work	Employed	Unemployed looking for work	Employed	Unemployed looking for work
Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals	114	0	487	0	224	0

Construction Trades Workers	152	0	719	0	392	0
Machinery Operators and Drivers	4	0	20	0	15	0
Road and Rail Drivers	168	0	916	0	368	0
Construction and Mining Labourers	80	0	313	0	123	0
Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians	98	0	470	0	177	0
Specialist Managers	262	0	1304	0	570	0

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

### 3.2.2.5 Local businesses

There is limited statistical information about the number and capacity of businesses in Goorambat. SIA consultation with local stakeholders confirmed there are several small local retail businesses in Goorambat who would benefit strongly from patronage by construction workforce associated with the Project, including:

- The Diggers Wife Café, a not-for-profit social enterprise cafe operated by the Goorambat Veterans' Retreat Inc. The café was established in 2020 and operates within the town hall, with all proceeds contributed to the development of the Veterans' retreat. The business is the only café in the community and was established to leverage and provide a further point of attraction for the high level of travellers visiting the Goorambat Silo Art.
- The Goorambat Railway Hotel, a family-orientated restaurant providing pub/bistro services. The Hotel was described by SIA participants as being the 'social hub' of the community and as playing a vital role in providing opportunity for social connection.

The availability of construction, earthworks and engineering businesses in Goorambat who could support during construction is limited, with most of these businesses reportedly located in the town of Benalla, or Shepparton and Wangaratta.

## 3.2.3 Housing and accommodation

### 3.2.3.1 Dwelling count and structure

According to the 2016 Census, there were 125 private dwellings in Goorambat, of which 88.8% were occupied and 11.2% were unoccupied (Table 3-8). There is little variety in the housing stock in Goorambat, with all occupied private dwellings classified as detached 'separate' houses (100%) according to the 2016 census. As shown in Table 3-8, both Shepparton and Wangaratta LGAs have a much larger supply of housing (25,054 dwellings and 12,351 dwellings, respectively) than the more rural Benalla LGA (6,370 dwellings).

Table 3-8 Housing and accommodation

Metric	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Shepparton	Wangaratta	Victoria
Occupied private dwellings	88.8%	87.8%	90.1%	88.9%	88.3%
Unoccupied private dwellings	11.2%	12.2%	9.9%	11.1%	11.7%
Total dwellings	125	6,370	25,054	12,351	2,391,337

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

### 3.2.3.2 Dwelling tenure

Both Goorambat and Benalla LGA have a higher level of home ownership than is typical in Victoria (Table 3-9). In 2016, most dwellings within Goorambat were predominantly owned either outright or with a mortgage (84.7%),

compared to 71.3% in Benalla LGA and 67.6% in Victoria. There is a low proportion of rented dwellings in Goorambat (13.5%), compared to Benalla LGA (24.1%), Shepparton LGA (28.7%) and Wangaratta LGA (23.0%).

Table 3-9 Housing tenure, 2016

Tenure	Goorambat	Benalla LGA	Shepparton	Wangaratta	Victoria
Owned (fully or with a mortgage)	84.7%	71.3%	66.6%	72.5%	67.6%
Rented	13.5%	24.1%	28.7%	23.0%	28.7%
Other tenure type	0.0%	1.4%	1.0%	0.9%	0.8%
Tenure type not stated	5.4%	3.3%	3.6%	3.5%	2.8%

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 Census of Population and Housing. General Community Profile. Catalogue number 2001.0

### 3.2.3.3 House price and rental trends

There is limited housing for purchase or rent in Goorambat township. A search of realestate.com.au found that as of October 2021, there is one house for purchase and no properties available for rent (REA Group, 2021).

At the regional level, stakeholder consultation indicated that there is an overall declining availability and affordability of housing to purchase and rent within Benalla LGA. It was reported there were several drivers of this trend, including Covid-19 and the trend of regional migration from Melbourne and other major cities into the regions, along with recent population growth driven by manufacturing developments and other solar farm projects in the region. These factors have led to high cumulative demands for housing to purchase and rent, with house prices and rental costs reaching record highs.

As of September 2021, the median house sale price for Benalla (town) is \$383,000 (Table 3-10). While well below the Victorian average of \$823,201, it represents an annual price change of 31.8 per cent (RP Data, 2021a). There are currently only 31 houses available for purchase taking on average only 34 days to sell (compared to 58 days in August 2020) (RP Data, 2021a). The median rent for houses in Benalla also increased from \$320 in October 2020 to \$370 in September 2021 (12.1% change). This is accompanied by an extremely low rental vacancy rate of 0.3% in September 2021 (SQM Research, 2021). Large rental price increases and low rental vacancies have also been experienced in the surrounding regional centres of Wangaratta and Shepparton (Table 3-10).

Anecdotal evidence from SIA participants indicated increased rental prices have disproportionately affected low-income households in the region with some residents being forced to relocate from their long-term rental properties due to price increases.

Table 3-10 Housing purchase and rental price data, Sep 2021

Regional centre	Median house price <sup>1</sup>		Median rental price <sup>1</sup>		Rental vacancy rate (Sep 2021) <sup>2</sup>
	Sep 2021	12-month change	Sep 2021	12-month change	
Benalla	\$383,000	31.8%	\$370 pw	12.1%	0.3%
Wangaratta	\$424,000	34.9%	\$380 pw	15.2%	0.2%
Shepparton	\$373,000	24.2%	\$340 p w	4.6%	0.9%

Source: <sup>1</sup> RP Data 2021; <sup>2</sup> SQM Research, 2021.

### 3.2.3.4 Short term accommodation

There are limited short-term accommodation facilities within Goorambat, with consultation indicating there is only one Airbnb 'farm-stay' accommodation located 5-minute drive from the community.

As the city centre for the LGA, the majority of short-term accommodation facilities are based in Benalla. An online search in October 2021 of 'booking.com' indicated there are 16 short-term accommodation facilities in Benalla. These include a mix of hotels, serviced apartments, 'bed and breakfasts' and motels. Consultation for the SIA identified that accommodation facilities in Benalla often reach capacity when there are local events, particularly the Wall to Wall Festival held annually in April. Consultation further indicated there is a much greater availability of short-term accommodation facilities in the larger nearby regional centres of Shepparton and Wangaratta.



Benalla Rural City Council advised that there is strong interest amongst some landholders and businesses in the region with respect to the potential business opportunities that may occur from hosting temporary workforce accommodation facilities on their land (SIA consultation, 2021). The recently completed Winton Solar Farm was referred to as a positive example, with a workforce accommodation facility noted as being established at the nearby Winton Raceway to support the project's construction workforce.

## 3.2.4 Access to community infrastructure, facilities and services

Community infrastructure refers to facilities, spaces, and services that support the wellbeing and quality of life for our communities (VPA, 2020). This includes facilities for education and learning; health and emergency services; arts and culture; sport, recreation and leisure; justice; and voluntary and faith services.

Being a relatively small community, Goorambat has a limited range of community infrastructure and services, with residents required to access education, medical and other services (such as retail) in the closest regional centre of Benalla, located approximately 17 km south of the town.

### 3.2.4.1 Health and social services

There are limited health and social services within Goorambat. In 2019, the former Goorambat Primary School was purchased by a not-for-profit organisation to establish the Goorambat Veterans Retreat, a proposed accommodation retreat to provide respite for veterans suffering from mental health related illness. According to SIA consultation with the local manager, development of the retreat slowed considerably in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and inability of the organisation to secure volunteer labour. As a not-for-profit run establishment, development of the retreat relies on donations and funding, and it was suggested during consultation by several stakeholders that the financial or in-kind contributions to the retreat would be a welcomed social investment within the community. The retreat currently operates the Diggers Wife Café as a means to provide financial support to the business (refer to Section 3.2.2.5).

Benalla is the main centre in the Benalla District for health services. The Benalla Health Centre offers basic hospital care and a wide range of community health services, although patients requiring treatment beyond basic services are referred to major hospitals in Wangaratta, Shepparton or Albury (SIA consultation, 2021). The facility provides a 24-hour nurse led emergency service, with on call support from the local general practitioners (GPs). Benalla is serviced by three private medical practices providing GP services.

The Benalla Community Care – Ray Sweeney Centre is a partnership between Benalla Health and the Benalla Rural City Council. The shared facility provides a hub for community-based services provided by Benalla Health and Benalla Council as well as other visiting agencies and services. The centre provides a range of allied health services, as well as social services including aged care services, family services, and child support. Some mental health services are provided in Benalla, although the majority of services are provided from Wangaratta (Glenister et al. 2019).

As identified in 3.2.6.4, Benalla Rural City has higher than average rates of social disadvantage, significant levels of family violence, and high rates of mental ill health. A number of key organisations, including Benalla Community Health, the Tomorrow Today Foundation, Women's Health Goulburn North East and Benalla Rural City Council, were identified during SIA consultation as implementing a range of important programs to address systemic education, social and health challenges within the Benalla region (Benalla Health, 2021; Tomorrow Today, 2021; WHGNE, 2021). Benalla hosts an annual White Ribbon march in response to concern about family violence in the area (Glenister et al., 2019).

During SIA consultation, stakeholders indicated that healthcare in Benalla, similar to other rural and remote regions in Australia, is characterised by a lack of affordability and staffing issues. Poor telecommunication and internet quality in the region further impacts the ability of residents in the region to access telehealth services (Section 3.2.4.7)

### 3.2.4.2 Education services

Goorambat Primary School was opened in 1865 however, due to declining numbers of students it was closed in 2010. The school grounds were listed for sale in 2019, with the new owners turning the site into a Veterans Retreat (refer to 3.2.4.1). Broken Creek Primary School on Quinn Road is the closest school to Goorambat and is

located five minutes' drive from the main street in Goorambat. Children and youth within Goorambat and surrounding areas also travel to Benalla to access education services (Table 3-11). There is a TAFE and community college in Benalla providing vocational education and training.

**Table 3-11 Education services in Benalla**

Community service	Goorambat	Benalla
Education services		
Preschool	N/A	Bernard Briggs Kindergarten
		Munro Avenue Preschool
Primary school	N/A	Australian Christian College – Hume (prep-year 8)
		Benalla P-12 College
Highschool	N/A	FCJ College Benalla
		Benalla P-12 College
Vocational/TAFE	N/A	GoTafe
		The Centre - Community College

### 3.2.4.3 Emergency services

Fire, police, ambulance and state emergency services are coordinated in the SIA study area from command centres in Benalla. According to consultation, these agencies are generally well equipped and organised to respond to incidents in the area. However, given the voluntary nature of some these agencies, particularly fire services, recruiting and retaining volunteers was cited as an ongoing organisational capacity issue affecting service delivery. The quality of telecommunication services within the local study area was also cited as sometimes affecting the ability of emergency services to respond to incidents.

Table 3-12 profiles emergency services in the SIA study area.

**Table 3-12 Emergency services in local and regional study areas**

Service	Description
Fire services	<p>Fire services throughout the social study area are coordinated by the Goorambat-Stewarton Country Fire Association (CFA), with a local fire station operated in Goorambat. The Goorambat-Stewarton fire brigade operates on a volunteer basis with 70-80 volunteers and are coordinated at a regional level by the North East Region arm of the CFA.</p> <p>SIA consultation with the captain of the Goorambat-Stewarton CFA brigade indicated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Call outs primarily relate to house fires, traffic accidents and bush fires.</li> <li>– The brigade currently operates with two tankers and an ultralight firefighting tanker.</li> <li>– In recent years, the organisation has experienced difficulty in attracting volunteers due to there being less people in the community and the ageing nature of the population.</li> <li>– While current levels of firefighting equipment are adequate for community needs, it was suggested that the possibility of Neoen providing additional 'manpower' to the brigade through project personnel volunteering would be a welcomed social investment.</li> <li>– There is a current lack of clarity with respect to the brigade's understanding of their role and responsibility in providing emergency response provisions to the Project during construction and operations.</li> </ul>
Police	The Benalla Police Station is the main station for the region and is located along the main street of Benalla. This is the closest police station to the project site.
Ambulance	The Ambulance Victoria station in Benalla is the main station for the region and is located along the main street of Benalla. This is the closest ambulance station to the project site.
State Emergency Services (SES)	There is a State Emergency Service (SES) Unit in Benalla with volunteer members. The unit is the control agency for flood, storm, earthquake and tsunami response. Benalla SES is also equipped to handle road crash rescues.

### 3.2.4.4 Community and civic facilities

There are three key civic and community facilities in Goorambat. These are:

- The Goorambat Mechanics Institute Hall (the ‘town hall’)
- The St Paul’s Anglican Church
- The Goorambat Uniting Church.

According to stakeholders during SIA consultation, these facilities are well-utilised and provide an important meeting place for local community groups and a space to connect with others.

The Goorambat town hall in particular is used regularly by the Goorambat community for functions and social events and is the local meeting place for the Goorambat & District Community Group (refer to Section 3.2.6.3). In 2019, the ‘Diggers Wife Café’ opened on the premises, providing the town’s only local café (Section 3.2.2.5).

The town hall is owned and maintained by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), who was identified during consultation as having recently undertaken a number of renovations to the premises in light of the success and popularity with local tourists of The Diggers Wife Café.

### 3.2.4.5 Arts and cultural facilities

Goorambat and the broader Benalla LGA have a thriving arts scene, where the arts, cultural events and festivals are a key source of community identity and play an important role in bringing people of the area together to connect. Goorambat is home to the renowned Goorambat Silo Complex, a community-funded project consisting of three painted grain silos on the town’s main street. The silo art in Goorambat was established in 2018 with Australian artist Jimmy DVate painting a Barking Owl on a silo in Goorambat (Australian Silo Art, 2017). In 2019 the silo art was continued with Jimmy painting another silo in Goorambat of three horses galloping. The horses painted were a tribute to local stud horses raised in the area.

The North East Silo Art Trail starts in Benalla and links up the small towns of Goorambat, Devenish, Tungamah and St James and the significant Winton Wetlands which feature silo art (Enjoy Benalla, 2017). This is a popular tourism opportunity in the region and provides local towns with an opportunity to showcase their art.

The inside of the Goorambat Uniting Church also features a large-scale mural (‘Sophia’). The mural ‘Sophia’ was developed as part of the Wall to Wall festival and represents the female aspect of the holy spirit, representing the culture and community of the church (Enjoy Benalla, 2017).

Combined, these art features form part of the North East Victoria Silo Art Trail and attracts hundreds of visitors to the town annually.



Figure 3-10 Silo art in Goorambat - 1



Figure 3-11 Silo art in Goorambat - 2

Source: Enjoy Benalla, 2017

### 3.2.4.6 Sports, recreation and outdoor facilities

Sport plays an important role in Goorambat. The ‘Goorambat and District Football Netball Club’ hosts an Australian Rules football and Netball team competing in the regional Ovens & King Football League competition. Until recently there was also a Goorambat cricket team who competed in the Benalla and District Cricket association, however this was identified during consultation as having been recently disbanded.

During SIA consultation, nearly all stakeholders described the important role of the Football – Netball Club in bringing the community together and promoting social interaction, as well as providing opportunities for physical activity amongst both the local youth and adult population. The club was also described as being critical to youth mental health and wellbeing, given it is ‘often the only opportunity for kids on farms to connect with others’ (SIA consultation, 2021).

The club and associated sport competitions have not operated for most of 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders described closure of the club and consequent loss of income from club canteen operations as impacting ongoing grounds and facilities maintenance. Neoen provided sponsorship to the club in 2020 and there is a desire for such ongoing support in the future.

Additionally, there is a small recreation reserve located on the main street of Goorambat that has been the focus of several recent ‘improvement’ activities by the local Goorambat & District Community Group. These include the installation of a new toilet block, a children’s playground (with the supporting contribution from Neoen) and a push-button electric BBQ. One SIA participant described these improvements as being ‘relatively small’, but important in the sense that they ‘add life to the town and encourage families to connect outdoors’. The Goorambat & District Community Group is reportedly planning to improve landscaping in the park and potentially install a war memorial.

There is a wide range of sports clubs and facilities within the wider Benalla LGA which further provide opportunity for physical recreation and social connection for regional communities (Table 3-13).

*Table 3-13 Sports, recreation and outdoor facilities in local and regional study areas*

<b>Goorambat</b>	<b>Benalla LGA</b>
– Goorambat and District Football Netball Club	– Benalla Rovers Soccer Club
– Tennis Club of Goorambat East Inc	– Benalla Hockey Club
– Goorambat Recreation Reserve	– Benalla Saints Football and Netball Club
	– Benalla Basketball Association
	– Benalla and District Cricket Association
	– Benalla & District Junior Football League
	– Benalla All Blacks Football and Netball Club
	– Benalla Swimming Club

### 3.2.4.7 Other infrastructure

Anecdotal data collected during SIA consultation identified that access to reliable telecommunications infrastructure is highly important to residents of the Goorambat given the rural nature of the town and its relative lack of immediate access to services. However, Goorambat (and other areas within Benalla LGA) is an identified ‘Mobile Black Spot’ which experiences overall poor telecommunications coverage (Ruppert, 2019). SIA participants described a lack of mobile connectivity as impacting the ability of residents to connect with services and as being a particular hindrance to local children and their ability to carry out online schooling via internet during recent Covid-19 lockdowns. The quality of telecommunication services within the local study area was also cited as sometimes affecting the ability of emergency services to respond to incidents, and as reinforcing general disadvantage in the region (3.2.6.4). The issue is well recognised as a priority for regional community development, with Neoen currently working in partnership with Telstra, Benalla Local Government and State and Federal MPs to explore ways to improve mobile phone coverage for the region (Ruppert, 2019) (see also Section 5).

## 3.2.5 Aboriginal cultural values and interests

The recognised Traditional Owners in the Benalla LGA are the Yorta Yorta, Bangerang and Taungurung. However, the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) are the Recognised Aboriginal Party (RAP) for land on which the Project occurs. Aboriginal people have a deep and continuous connection to the place now called Goorambat, and more broadly, Benalla, as evidenced by the number of identified local cultural heritage places. While the site of the proposed Project does not specifically contain an area of cultural heritage sensitivity<sup>1</sup>(AECOM, 2020), there are 209 registered cultural heritage places in Benalla LGA, including burial sites, artefact scatter, earth features, scarred trees, stone features and an Aboriginal cultural place (Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, 2014).

Neoen has undertaken consultation with representatives of the YYNAC to provide an overview of the Project and discuss cultural heritage sensitivities and processes and seek their feedback on Project issues of interest. Key issues raised during Neoen's consultation with the YYNAC of relevance to this SIA include:

- Interest in employment and business opportunities.
- The need to ensure access to job readiness programs and skills training for Traditional Owners to access Project employment opportunities
- Interest in opportunities the Project can provide to build the capacity of Aboriginal businesses

Neoen has also sought input from representatives of the Bangerang and Taungurung Traditional Owner Groups more broadly on project interests. Further details on the outcomes of Neoen's engagement with Traditional Owners are provided in the Project's Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan.

## 3.2.6 Community health and wellbeing

### 3.2.6.1 Community values and identity

The Benalla Rural City Community Plan 2016-2036 (BRCC, 2016, pp. 12-13) describes the following values as being important to the Benalla Rural City community:

- good community spirit
- a strong ethos of volunteering
- recognition and celebration of Aboriginal history and culture, as well as its agricultural and manufacturing heritage
- diversity of people and culture
- arts and culture.

During consultation, local stakeholders reflected these values by describing Goorambat as a 'friendly', 'caring' and a close-knit community with a 'small village feel'. Stakeholders also uniquely described Goorambat as a 'forward looking' community who is known for its entrepreneurial, self-reliant and 'can-do' approach to its own rural development. In this respect, the Goorambat and District Community Group was described as 'instrumental to the towns functioning' and as largely responsible for the town's current progressive development (refer to Section 3.2.6.3). Stakeholders consulted spoke proudly of the work the Group has achieved and noted the organisation involved 'most residents' of the town. In particular, the group was praised for its role in contributing to the revitalisation of the community as well as enhancing residents' participation in public decision-making and strengthening overall community capacity.

Stakeholders also spoke about the range of sport organisations available and the strong volunteering and participation by local residents in these clubs, despite the community's small size.

The Goorambat Silo Art and the 'Sophia Mural' inside the nearby Uniting Church was further noted as strengthening the community's identity and sense of place.

Furthermore, residents of Goorambat and the surrounding area identify strongly with the surrounding fertile agricultural lands that support pastoralism and agriculture. The community's identity is strongly embedded in the

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<sup>1</sup> As defined under the *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018* (Vic).

region's rural history with many families in the area noted during consultation as being direct descendants of the original European settlers of the area.

### 3.2.6.2 Amenity and lifestyle

Amenity refers to the use and enjoyment of public and private properties. Residential amenity in Goorambat and areas close to the Project is characterised by:

- Low population density, enabling privacy and enjoyment of homes and the outdoors.
- Rural land uses (e.g. rural residential, hobby farms, cropping and sheep grazing activities, equine breeding).
- Access to basic facilities (such as local social and sporting clubs and facilities) which support community interaction and healthy lifestyles.
- Strong community networks.
- A rural and natural landscape characterised by vistas across agricultural land and areas of natural bushland.

Community members in Goorambat and properties surrounding the Project further enjoy a rural lifestyle based on:

- A quiet environment.
- Agriculture as a primary source of livelihood and identity.
- Enjoyment of the expansive pastoral landscape and some areas of natural bushland.
- Dependence on small towns to meet daily needs and social connection, and regional centres (such as Benalla) for more specialised needs.

Other features of the social environment described during consultation as supporting local quality of life include access to a clean and healthy environment, natural assets (such as good quality soils and an abundance of natural wildlife), affordable housing, and a safe, family friendly environment.

### 3.2.6.3 Community cohesion

Community cohesion refers to a community's connectedness and its capacity for sustaining social relationships, providing mutual support and holding communities together (Jenks and Jones 2009)

As identified previously in 3.2.6.1, Goorambat and the surrounding community areas are characterised by high levels of social connection and community cohesion. One stakeholder during SIA consultation described the community by saying 'Goorambat is a passionate and close-knit community'. Stakeholders attributed this high level of connection to the general 'isolated' nature of rural community living and the resulting 'need (for everyone) to pull together'. The lack of services locally available was also described as contributing to a high level of volunteerism. This is seen by ABS data, whereby in 2016, 29.8% of people in Goorambat did voluntary work through an organisation or a group, compared to just 19.2% in Victoria.

The reported high level of community cohesion is further evidenced by the strength and number of community organisations within Goorambat. The Goorambat and District Community Group was noted in particular as having a high level of participation from local residents and as being a 'driving force' in the community (SIA consultation, 2021). The organisation formed in 2016 as a not-for-profit community group to provide assistance and communication to the approximate 300 residents of the towns. In 2018, the Group 'brought together the whole community' to fund-raise for the painting of the Goorambat grain silos as part of the Wall-to-Wall Festival held in Benalla (SIA consultation, 2021). The Group has since continued to meet regularly in the local town hall to discuss and plan for further projects to contribute to the beautification and social wellbeing of Goorambat, including:

- Funding and instigation of a further silo paintings in the town, and construction of fencing around the two visitor viewing areas for the silo art.
- In-kind assistance to the Veteran's Retreat organisation to assist with establishment of the 'Diggers Wife Café'.
- Fundraising and construction of a children's playground, toilet block and BBQ facility in the Goorambat recreation reserve.
- Providing catering for events at the Goorambat Hall, including weddings, funerals, and parties.

Other reported local community organisations include a local volunteer committee who manage the town hall as well as a committee for management of the Football Netball Club (refer to Section 3.2.4.6).

### 3.2.6.4 Socio-economic disadvantage

The ABS's Socio-Economic Indices for Areas (SEIFA) are four composite indices that rank geographic areas across Australia in terms of their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, based on Census data.

Geographic disadvantage is most commonly understood using the SEIFA's Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), which summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area, with a focus on measuring disadvantage. Factors within the IRSD, such as unemployment, low incomes, educational attainment, overcrowded living arrangements, rate of disability among people under the age of 70 and poor proficiency in English, provide an indication of the overall potential for disadvantage in an area.

Index and decile<sup>2</sup> scores for the IRSD are presented in Table 3-14 for the local and regional study area and compared to the Australian average score of 1,000.

Table 3-14 Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage, 2016

Indicator	Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage			
	Score	Decile (Australia)	Decile (Victoria)	Rank (in Victoria)
Goorambat (SSC)	1023	6	6	1382
Benalla LGA	951	4	2	16
Greater Shepparton	948	4	2	14
Greater Wangaratta	983	6	4	32

Source: ABS (2017a) 2016 - Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia. Catalogue number 2033.0.55.001

According to the ISRAD Index, the town of Goorambat is the least disadvantaged area out of the SIA study area, with a score of 1023 (above the Australian average of 1000) and is located within the sixth lowest disadvantaged decile in Victoria. In contrast, Benalla LGA is highly socially disadvantaged. With an index score of 951, the LGA is rated in the second highest decile of disadvantage in Victoria and ranks 16th out of all 79 Victorian LGAs in terms of relative disadvantage. The LGA of Greater Shepparton is slightly more disadvantaged than Benalla LGA, with an index score of 948 and a ranking of 14 within the State.

These findings are consistent with other research undertaken into the socio-economic wellbeing of the Benalla community. In 2015, a study on persistent communal disadvantage in Australia prepared by the not-for-profit community organisation, Jesuit Social Services, listed Benalla as one of the most socially disadvantaged towns in Victoria (Vinson and Rawsthorne, 2015). Based on 22 social indicators examined, the report determined Benalla as falling into the top five per cent in Victoria for the highest number of juvenile convictions and in the top 10 per cent for child maltreatment and long-term unemployment. Also very low was the proportion of Year 9 students "at or above national minimum standard percentage" for reading skills.

A study undertaken by the Department of Planning and Community Development in 2011 on 'Change and Disadvantage in the Hume Region' identified the town of Benalla as being an area of greater disadvantage given 'around 44% of its population has a low income and it has higher than average public housing, more people aged over 65 and more single parent families' (DPCD, 2011, p. 29).

More recently, a community profile produced by the Central Hume Primary Care Partnership in February 2021 highlighted the following socio-economic issues as core challenges for the Benalla LGA (CHPPP, 2021):

- The percentage of people with income less than \$500 per week (35.9%) is higher than the Victorian benchmark (28.2%).

<sup>2</sup> The SEIFA divides a population into ten equal groups, called a decile. The lowest scoring 10 per cent of these groups are given a decile number of 1, which indicates relatively greater disadvantage in general, and the highest scoring 10 per cent of areas are given a decile of 10, which indicates a relative lack of disadvantage in general.

- A very high teenage fertility rate (20.6 live births per 1,000 females aged 15–19) compared to Victorian benchmark (9.5 live births).
- A high percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more early childhood domains (14.3% in Benalla LGA compared to 10.1% in Victoria)
- A higher rate of daily consumption of sugar sweetened beverage consumption (19.3%) compared to Victorian benchmark (10.1%)
- Higher rates of psychological distress and diagnosis for anxiety or depression (19.3%) than Victorian benchmark (15.4%).

In addition, Benalla LGA has the highest per capita level of suicide over the 2011-2020 period in Victoria, as well as one of the highest per capita levels of suicide attempts presenting to emergency departments (Office of the Premier, 2021).

### 3.2.6.5 Crime and safety

During SIA consultation, stakeholders described Goorambat as generally a safe and welcoming community with anecdotally low levels of crime. It was indicated that Benalla LGA more broadly however, similar to other rural and regional areas in Australia, experiences a number of crime and safety issues. Family violence, in particular, is recognised as a key issue affecting the health and wellbeing of residents in Benalla LGA (BRCC, 2015).

According to crime statistics from the Victorian Government (CSA, 2021), for the year ending June 2021:

- The criminal incident rate per 100,000 persons for Benalla LGA was 7,144.9 incidents, which was much higher when compared with the Victorian rate of 5,673.0 incidents.
- The most common offences within Benalla LGA were breach of family violence order, criminal damager, other theft and common assault.
- The incidence rate of family violence in Benalla LGA was 2,728.5 incidents per 100,000 persons, which was much higher compared with the Victorian rate of 1,399.1 incidents.

Despite the issues noted above, the 2017-18 ABS National Health Survey estimated that approximately 61.6 per cent of residents in Benalla LGA feel very safe/safe walking alone in the local area after dark compared to 53.0 per cent of persons in Victoria.

### 3.2.7 Access and connectivity

Goorambat-Chesney Road is the main street running through Goorambat and is the central hub of all activities in the town. The Midland Highway is the main access of Goorambat to travel in and out of Benalla, the highway is accessed via Benalla-Tocumwal Road, which extends from Goorambat to the Highway.

In addition to this, there is a regular V-Line bus service that runs to Melbourne and stops in Goorambat. There is also a V-Line train station in Benalla which connects the region to Melbourne and other regional towns.

A number of nationally significant transport routes, including the Hume Highway and Inland Rail route, traverse Benalla LGA. This was cited during SIA consultation as being a key competitive advantage for the region and driver for attracting further regional business development.

During SIA consultation, some participants noted the local area was susceptible to traffic accidents, particularly given the poor condition of roads in some places and propensity for overtaking / speeding by road users. It was also indicated there is often a high number of outside travellers passing through Goorambat with caravans, which were perceived as presenting a danger to other road users.



### 3.3 Summary

Key findings from the Project’s social baseline are summarised in Table 3-15.

Table 3-15 Social baseline findings

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The Project’s surroundings are characterised by ‘picturesque’ rural landscapes, including grazing land, thoroughbred breeding and natural bushland, which is strongly valued by the local community.</li> <li>– Benalla LGA is a growing region, with engaged, safe and inclusive communities.</li> <li>– The economy of Benalla LGA is underpinned by a range of traditional and new industries, with the region having witnessed significant growth in renewable energy and manufacturing development in recent years.</li> <li>– A number of nationally significant transport routes traverse the region (e.g. the Hume Highway and Inland Rail route), providing an attractive competitive advantage for regional based industries.</li> <li>– Tourism is also a growing sector in the Benalla LGA, with a suite of new arts and cultural experiences (such as the Goorambat Grain Silos) driving increased visitation and economic growth for the region.</li> <li>– Goorambat along with the broader Benalla LGA experience low levels of unemployment in comparison to the average for Victoria.</li> <li>– There are a range of higher education opportunities available in the Benalla LGA (TAFE institutions).</li> <li>– Benalla LGA is experiencing strong housing demand as a result of anecdotal inward migration from other areas of the State.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Goorambat and Benalla LGA are characterised by ageing populations and experience difficulty retaining youth populations.</li> <li>– Benalla LGA experiences high levels of disadvantage in comparison to the State average.</li> <li>– Declining housing affordability and availability, with high levels of demand for limited property (both rental and for purchase).</li> <li>– Poor telecommunications and internet connectivity.</li> <li>– Local community organisations (e.g. CFA) have declining volunteer rates.</li> <li>– COVID-19 and 2020 bushfires has impacted regional business confidence and ability to remain competitive.</li> <li>– Benalla LGA experiences higher rates of family violence incidences and suicide compared to the State average.</li> </ul>

## 4. Social impact assessment

Table 4-1 identifies and evaluates the significance of social benefits and impacts that may arise from the construction and operation of the Project. The impacts are assessed based on a likelihood and consequence framework outlined in Section 2.4.2.

Social impacts were assessed to determine their likely level of 'significance'. Significance was determined by considering the likelihood of an impact occurring (Table 2-4), and the anticipated (most likely) consequence of the impact if it were to occur (Table 2-5). The overall level of significance was determined by combining the likelihood and consequence criteria (Table 2-6).

Suggested management measures have been provided to mitigate impacts and enhance benefits. The management measures are described in detail in Section 5.

Table 4-1 Impact assessment

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
<b>Population and demographics</b>										
S1	Population and demographic change from construction workforce	<p>The majority of construction personnel (approximately 200-250 FTE workers at peak construction) will mainly be sourced from communities within Benalla LGA and surrounding LGAs of Wangaratta and Shepparton and will be employed on a 'bus-in-bus-out' (BIBO) basis. The construction personnel will continue to live at their existing residence within the regional communities. A small number of specialist skills personnel may be engaged from elsewhere and are anticipated to temporarily visit the project site. Since the number of such workforce is likely to be temporary and small, it is unlikely that a workforce accommodation facility will be constructed for the Project and these workers would be accommodated at existing accommodation facilities within one hour driving distance from project.</p> <p>On this basis, Project construction would contribute to temporary population increase of non-resident population in Goorambat during working hours as the workers come to the project site and a potential small temporary increase in surrounding area where the non-resident workers will be accommodated during the 12 months of construction.</p> <p>Given the typical nature of construction workforce, it is anticipated that the additional temporary population would be a predominantly male population (refer to impact S29).</p> <p>Long-term population increase from construction workforce personnel relocating to the Goorambat community is unlikely given the short term nature of construction and limited availability of housing to purchase or rent (refer to Section 3.2.3).</p>	C	Goorambat community Regional study area communities	Neutral Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Minor	LOW	-	LOW
S2	Population and demographic change from operations workforce	<p>The Project will require approximately 6 - 11 FTE workers during operations. These workers will be sourced from the regional study area and are likely to reside in Benalla, due to the limited available housing for purchase or rent in Goorambat. Population growth in Benalla from the Project operations workforce is not anticipated, however would contribute in a small way to regional population stability.</p>	O	Benalla community	Neutral Long-term Direct	Likely	Minor	LOW	-	LOW
<b>Livelihoods, employment and economy</b>										
S3	Direct project employment opportunities	<p>The Project's construction phase will create direct employment for approximately 200 – 250 FTE workers at peak construction, potentially increasing the level of employment in the region. This will include people from the local and regional study areas, in line with Neoen's approach to local participation to recruit workers from these areas.</p> <p>The ability to gain Project employment would provide particular benefit for young people, women and Indigenous people who experience high levels of disadvantage and employment in equity in the regional study area (refer to Section 3.2.6.4). The Social Procurement Plan includes a number of actions to maximise employment outcomes in particular for young people, women and Indigenous persons.</p> <p>The majority of stakeholders engaged during consultation indicated the potential of the Project to have positive impact on the regional economy through direct employment opportunities was a key benefit.</p>	C	Communities of local and regional study areas	Positive Temporary Direct	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Social Procurement Plan (including local content commitments)	HIGH
S4		<p>The Project's operation phase will also employ approximately 6 personnel that could be filled by people from the local and regional study areas. Similar to the construction phase, residents from the local and regional study areas would be prioritised in line with Neoen's approach to local participation.</p>	O	Communities of local and regional study areas	Positive Long-term Direct	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Social Procurement Plan	MODERATE
S5	Procurement opportunities	<p>The Project will provide procurement opportunities for capable regional businesses to provide construction materials and services (such as infrastructure construction and transport), which would lead to increased revenue and business growth for those engaged and contribute to the regional economy. This would include potential opportunities for Indigenous businesses.</p>	C / O	Local and regional businesses Indigenous businesses	Positive Temporary Direct	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Social Procurement Plan (including local content commitments)	HIGH

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
		The Local Participation Plan includes several actions to provide regional and Indigenous businesses with full, fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in the Project's supply chain.								
S6	Indirect employment through procurement opportunities	The procurement of local and regional goods and services to support construction and operation of the Project would indirectly generate employment opportunities for residents of the region. The Local Participation Plan includes several actions to provide regional and Indigenous businesses with full, fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in the Project's supply chain, and therefore maximise indirect employment opportunities.	C / O	Local and regional businesses Indigenous businesses	Positive Temporary Indirect	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Social Procurement Plan	MEDIUM
S7	Increased demand for visitor accommodation	A small number of project management and other technical staff from Neoen's metropolitan head office may stay at the local and regional accommodation facilities for various periods of time during the project's construction and operation. This will offer an additional source of revenue for the local accommodation providers. Through the Project's Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan, Neoen will ensure local businesses receive regular communications regarding Project construction activities / schedule to assist business planning for potential increased demand.	C / O	Local accommodation providers	Positive Temporary Direct	Likely	Minor	MEDIUM	Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	MEDIUM
S8	Increased in local trade associated with expenditure of wages	Local food and retail businesses in Goorambat (i.e. The Diggers Wife Café and The Railway Hotel) would benefit economically from increased food and beverage trade as a result of patronage by the construction personnel working on the Project site. Through the Project's Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan, Neoen will ensure these local businesses receive regular communications regarding Project construction activities / schedule to assist business planning for increased trade demand. Neoen will also explore opportunities to support these local businesses through the potential procurement of catering services to support Project events.	C	The Diggers Wife Café The Railway Hotel	Positive Temporary Indirect	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	HIGH
S9	Enhanced economic prosperity to landholders through additional income	Neoen has entered into a negotiated agreement with host landholders for the lease of land to support Project infrastructure and allow construction/operation activities on their property. Project payments are uniformly negotiated with the landholders, with an increase in payment per year for the life of the Project. Project payments will generate an additional income stream. During consultation, landholders identified the additional income from hosting project infrastructure would provide a range of benefits to their families, including enhanced economic prosperity and improved farm viability, future financial security (i.e. 'drought proofing' farms) and ensuring a greater likelihood of successful farm succession. The later benefit was noted as particularly important to host landholders given the long multi-generation family history of most properties in the Goorambat area.	C / O	Host landholders	Positive Temporary Direct	Almost Certain	Moderate	HIGH	Negotiated agreement with landowners Ongoing engagement with the landholders	HIGH
S10	Disruption to host landholder farming / landuse activities	The location of Project construction site, construction activities and construction traffic have the potential to temporarily disrupt the usual agricultural activities on host landholder properties. To minimise any disruption to the business activities on the properties, Neoen has worked closely with the host landholders to determine the location of the Project and associated activities on the properties, preventing potential disruption of farming activities. During operations, the Project would not prevent the potential ongoing production of agriculture (i.e. sheep grazing), with grazing to be encouraged as a shared land use for the solar farm.	C	Host landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Minor	LOW	Ongoing engagement with the landholders  Community Complaint Management Mechanism	LOW
S11		Construction activities on host landholders' properties may cause potential disturbance or damage of private property infrastructure (e.g. tracks, fences, gates) from Project equipment and associated construction activities. Through prior engagement with the landholders, all Project infrastructure has been located to minimise disruption or damage to infrastructure.	C	Host landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Moderate	MEDIUM	Ongoing engagement with the landholders  Construction Management Plan  Community Complaint Management Mechanism	LOW

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
S12		Disturbance to host landholders' properties or farming activities may arise during construction and operations from Project personnel and their conduct on-site (e.g. leaving gates open).	C / O	Host landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Moderate	MEDIUM	Community Complaint Management Mechanism  Project Workforce Code of Conduct  Land access commitments	LOW
S13	Disruption to animals and associated business viability	There are several animal husbandry businesses operating on neighbouring properties surrounding the Project, such as a racehorse breeding business and sheep grazing. Stakeholders during SIA consultation raised concern about the potential for noise, dust and light from Project construction activities / traffic to impact the welfare of animals, with potential for disruption to their business and livelihoods.	C / O	Neighbouring landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Minor	LOW	Community Complaint Management Mechanism  Construction Management Plan	LOW
S14		Stakeholders during SIA consultation raised concern around the perceived potential of 'inaudible' electromagnetic waves from operation of the solar farm to effect welfare of animals on their properties. An assessment of the Project's potential for electromagnetic radiation and interference effects found that all potential sensitive receptors (residences) are located at significantly greater distances than 5 to 10m from the proposed substation and will not be adversely impacted by radiation effects (AECOM, 2020). The Project also seeks to connect into the existing 220kV overhead transmission line, and therefore, there will be no change to the current conditions. An assessment of the effect on animals was not stated, however.	O	Neighbouring landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Rare	Minimal	NEGLIGIBLE	Not applicable	NEGLIGIBLE
S15	Increased training opportunities	The Project's construction and operation phase will provide opportunities to enhance skills and capacity of young persons, women, Indigenous people (and Project employees in general) in the local and regional study areas through the proposed training and apprenticeship/trainee programs, as outlined in the Local Participation Plan.  Consultation with community members in the local and regional study areas identified a strong interest in the potential for the Project to create employment and skills development opportunities for young people.  Project training and development opportunities would provide particular benefit for young people, women and Indigenous people who experience high levels of disadvantage and employment inequity in the regional study area (refer to Section 3.2.6.4).	C / O	Communities of local and regional study areas	Positive Temporary Indirect	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Social Procurement Plan	HIGH
S16	Availability of labour	Construction labour demand may contribute to competition for labour in the regional study area, particularly if other projects are constructed during the same period. Major projects located in the regional study area that may contribute to labour shortages in combination with the Project include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Winton Solar Farm</li><li>Glenrowan West Solar Farm</li></ul> The Project's construction labour requirement is small, temporary and would be spread across the region, making it unlikely to contribute to labour draw from other industries in the region.	C	Regional study area communities	Negative Temporary Cumulative	Unlikely	Minor	LOW	Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	LOW
S17		Given the small, specialised workforce required for operations and the required industry skills available in the regional area, the Project is unlikely to generate competition or shortfalls for labour during the operations phase.	O	Regional study area communities	Neutral Long-term Cumulative	-	-	-	Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	-
<b>Housing and accommodation</b>										
S18	Increased demand for housing and accommodation access	In accordance with the approach to local participation, the majority of the construction workforce will consist of personnel already residing within one hour driving distance from the Project site, and therefore would continue to stay at their usual place of residence while working on the Project, with a small number of specialist workers visiting from elsewhere (if required), who would be accommodated in existing accommodation facilities. This will ensure that accommodation availability for tourists and other visitors in local accommodation	C	Regional study area communities	Negative Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Minor	LOW	No mitigation proposed	LOW

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
		facilities is maintained and avoid placing additional pressure on the local housing market (both for purchase and rental), which is currently experiencing high demand (refer to Section 3.2.3).								
S19		<p>The Project will require approximately 6-11 FTE workers during operations. In accordance with the Local Participation Plan, Neoen will prioritise the recruitment of existing residents from communities in the regional study area within one hour driving distance of the Project, but in the case that these employees cannot be found locally, Neoen would recruit workers from other regions.</p> <p>It is assumed new local workers would likely purchase or rent houses in Benalla or other nearby communities, given the constrained availability of housing in Goorambat. Based on the current levels of relative affordability and availability of housing (to purchase and rent) in Benalla, it is unlikely this small increase in demand would lead to substantial increases in demand and affordability of local housing.</p>	O	Regional study area communities	Negative Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Minor	LOW	No mitigation proposed	LOW
S20	Anxiety and resulting stress arising from the perceived potential impact of the Project on property values and potential fire hazard from the project infrastructure	<p>Some landowners near the Project are concerned that the value of their property could be impacted largely as a result of the Project's impact on visual amenity and rural character (refer to S26). This was identified during consultation as a source of anxiety amongst these stakeholders about their future financial security.</p> <p>Neighbouring landowners' concerns about the Project's potential to change property values are acknowledged. However, an assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of change is not possible given the individual circumstances of particular properties and a range of market drivers, including the current COVID-19 Pandemic which has resulted in elevated property prices across rural Victoria and Australia.</p> <p>It is acknowledged stress and anxiety about potential for negative impacts on property values and potential risk of fire is likely to result for some landholders near the project footprint.</p>	C / O	Neighbouring landholders	Negative Long-term Direct	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	<p>Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan (which also includes Frequently Asked Questions)</p> <p>Neighbour Construction Disruption Payments</p> <p>Risk and Emergency Management Plan (as part of Construction Management Plan and Environmental Management Plan)</p>	LOW
<b>Community infrastructure and services</b>										
S21	Increased demand on regional health services	<p>During construction it is expected that the construction workforce would generally be in good health condition when they arrive on roster and that they will address their health needs at their place of usual resident. However, in the case of an emergency or accident at the Project site, they may need to access health services in Benalla. Paramedic staff would be employed at the Project site during construction, in accordance with the Neoen Worksite Health and Safety Plan to mitigate demands on regional health services.</p> <p>The Project's operational requirement (6-11 persons) is small and unlikely to place additional demand or cause adverse impacts on health service capabilities in the region.</p>	C	Hospital and GP services Police Emergency services	Negative Temporary Indirect	Possible	Minor	MEDIUM	<p>Health and Safety Plan</p> <p>Community Engagement and Benefit-sharing Plan</p>	LOW
S22	Increased demand on emergency services (fire, ambulance and police)	<p>Demands on police, ambulance and fire services would potentially be experienced during both construction and operations in relation to potential traffic accidents, workplace accidents, and the need for patient transport to hospitals.</p> <p>There may also be demand for assistance from fire services in relation to bushfire planning / prevention to protect Project infrastructure during summer months. Consultation with the Goorambat CFA indicated that they anticipate limited demand from the Project and have the capacity to meet potential additional activity.</p>	C / O	Police Ambulance Fire Emergency services	Negative Long term Indirect	Possible	Medium	MEDIUM	<p>Fire Risk and Emergency Management Plan (as part of Construction Management Plan and Environmental Management Plan)</p> <p>Health and Safety Plan</p>	LOW
<b>Community health and wellbeing</b>										
S23	Community development and social investment	<p>Upon Project completion, Neoen will become a long-term member of the local Goorambat and wider Benalla LGA community. Neoen embraces its corporate social responsibility to contribute to the communities in which it operates. To maximise this contribution, Neoen will establish a Community Development Fund, providing \$75,000 a year for community projects located in the local and regional study areas. The fund will help build social assets and resources to support community resilience and quality of life in both Goorambat and Benalla LGA communities.</p>	C / O	Local and regional communities	Positive Long term Direct	Almost certain	Major	VERY HIGH	Community Benefit Scheme	VERY HIGH

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
S24	Environmental stressors affecting quality of life	Dust, noise, light and traffic associated with Project construction activities may disturb daily life in ways that affect the physical and mental wellbeing and quality of life of both host landholders and residents located on near the Project site. This is a particular concern if noise inhibits daily activities or causes sleep disturbance. Both host and neighbouring landholders would be sensitive to these changes as they would be used to a quiet environment and value the rural amenity of the area (refer to Section 3.2.6.2).	C	Host landholders Neighbouring landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Likely	Moderate	MEDIUM	Construction Management Plan (including noise, dust and light abatement measures)  Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan  Community Complaint Management Mechanism	LOW
S25		Project operation may expose host landholders and neighbouring landholders to amenity changes such as increase in light (i.e. through glare). However, project design and screening will avoid such amenity changes.	O	Host landholders Neighbouring landholders	Negative Long term Direct	Unlikely	Major	MEDIUM	Landscape Screening Plan	LOW
S26	Changes to visual amenity and sense of place	Infrastructure constructed on site and associated traffic movements to support construction may change the quiet rural amenity of host and neighbouring landholders' properties and potentially affect their enjoyment of the rural and natural landscape.	C	Host landholders Neighbouring landholders	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Moderate	MEDIUM	Construction Management Plan (including noise, dust and light abatement measures)  Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	LOW
S27		<p>The location and visibility of Project infrastructure may be perceived by some (particularly adjoining neighbours) as changing the rural landscape. Views of the Project upon completion was noted during SIA consultation by adjoining landholders as their key concern regarding the Project and was perceived as likely to impact their overall enjoyment of their property.</p> <p>The impact of the Project on scenic amenity and overall views was similarly a strong point raised in submissions on the Project during the development application process. Stakeholders during SIA consultation also raised concern that the close location of the Project to Goorambat would potentially detract from the visual amenity and overall character of the town, with a flow on negative impact to the attraction of tourists. However, other SIA consultation participants felt the Project infrastructure would be a point of interest, with the occurrence of other large-scale infrastructure (such as the transmission powerlines) already a common occurrence in the areas.</p> <p>Assessment of the Project's impacts on visual amenity (Hansen Partnership, 2019) found that changes to visual amenity for nearby sensitive receptors were limited or moderate in their worst case, and able to be appropriately managed with the implementation of management measures.</p> <p>Overall, changes to local visual amenity and character would likely occur as a result of the Project during operations, with the location of the Project in a previously rural environment potentially affecting neighbouring landholders and local Goorambat residents' enjoyment of local character and their sense of place.</p>	O	Host landholders Neighbouring landholders Goorambat community and residents	Negative Long term Direct	Almost certain	Moderate	HIGH	Environmental Management Plan (including noise, dust and light abatement measures)  Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan Landscape Screening Plan	MEDIUM
S28		<p>It was identified during SIA consultation there is some community concern around the cumulative loss of good quality land used for agricultural purposes and the associated change in traditional rural landscape arising from the combined impact of multiple solar farm projects in area.</p> <p>As identified in the town planning assessment of the Project (AECOM, cumulative impacts to agricultural productivity in the region are considered minimal as the Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Represents a small percentage of productive agricultural land within the Region.</li> <li>– The proposed change of land-use does not prevent the potential ongoing production of agriculture (e.g. sheep grazing). Grazing will be encouraged as a shared land use for the solar farm.</li> <li>– The proposed solar farm is considered compatible with cropping and grazing land uses and will not adversely affect the operation or expansion of local or regional agricultural land uses.</li> </ul>	C / O	Goorambat community and residents	Negative Long-term Cumulative	Possible	Moderate	MEDIUM	Landscape Screening Plan  Construction Management Plan / Environmental Management Plan  Agrisolar commitment	LOW

Ref	Summary	Impact description	Phase	Stakeholder group affected	Impact classification	Likelihood	Consequence	Initial impact significance	Management measure	Residual impact
		<p>The decommissioning of the Project will rehabilitate the project site to ensure that it continues to be viable for agricultural purposes following the completion of the Project.</p> <p>While potential impacts to the visual amenity and traditional rural landscape are acknowledged (refer to S27), a continuous buffer planting belt is proposed along the boundary of the site, all roadways and the railway alignment to mitigate these impacts.</p>								
S29	Changes in perception of personal safety	Presence of male dominated workforce during construction in the town of Goorambat may contribute to concerns about community safety within Goorambat particularly as the workforce would be non-local to Goorambat. The presence of a non-local construction workforce may also concern some residents regarding reduction in feelings of community cohesion.	C	Goorambat community and residents	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Negligible	LOW	Workforce Code of Conduct	LOW
S30	Intensification of community concerns associated with COVID-19	The presence of a non-local construction workforce during construction may exacerbate concern and anxiety associated with the potential that 'outside' workers may bring COVID-19 to regional Victoria.	C	Goorambat community and residents	Negative Temporary Direct	Possible	Negligible	LOW	Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan Health and Safety Plan	LOW
S31	Perceived impacts to traffic safety	<p>Increased truck movements to support Project construction along local roads (off the Project site) may increase the risk of traffic and road accidents. This was a particular concern for some participants during consultation who commented that oversized trucks carry project infrastructure would present a particular safety risk to local road users given the narrow existing roads around the site. There was also a concern regarding the potential for 'risky' and non-respectful driving behaviour from the construction workforce.</p> <p>A large range of management measures relating to traffic safety and road upgrades have been proposed for construction and operation of the Project as part of the Project's Traffic Management Plan.</p> <p>The project will potentially further minimise potential risks to local road user safety by investigating the use of bus in bus out (BIBO) arrangements to transport workers from regional centres to the Project site.</p>	C / O	Road users	Negative Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Catastrophic	HIGH	Construction Management Plan / Environmental Management Plan  Traffic Management Plan (including road upgrades as part of the Planning Permit conditions)	MEDIUM
<b>Access and connectivity</b>										
S32	Disruption to local traffic movement	<p>Increased truck movements (including haulage vehicles) along local roads may hamper the safe movement of stock and farm machinery, and present delays to other local road users accessing community services or other locations in the regional study area. The potential for traffic disruption was noted during consultation as a particular concern for the Goorambat Post Office, given such delays could affect delivery times and the overall quality of service delivery.</p> <p>A large range of management measures relating to traffic safety and road upgrades have been proposed for construction and operation of the Project as part of the Project's Traffic Management Plan.</p>	C	Landholders and agricultural producers Road users Local businesses Residents of local and regional study areas	Negative Temporary Direct	Unlikely	Major	MEDIUM	Construction Management Plan / Environmental Management Plan  Traffic Management Plan (including road upgrades as part of the Planning Permit conditions)  Neighbour Construction Disruption Payments	LOW



# 5. Management measures

## 5.1 Overview

The Project Social Management Framework comprises a number of management plans and programs which will be used to enhance the positive impacts of the Project and to avoid or reduce negative impacts, as identified previously in Section 4. Table 5-1 describes the function of each plan.

Table 5-1 Project social management related plans and programs

Plan / program	Description
Agrisolar commitment	Agrisolar is the co-existence of agriculture and solar power generation on the same land. Neoen is committed integrating continued agricultural production into all its projects and will encourage host landholders to undertake grazing as a shared land use for the Goorambat East Solar Farm.
Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan	Neoen has been implementing a comprehensive stakeholder and community engagement plan for the Project which would continue through construction and operation of the facility through the Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan. The purpose of the plan is to facilitate the successful execution of the Project while ensuring key stakeholders and communities are involved and consulted throughout each stage of the Project's lifecycle. This Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan outlines the benefit sharing initiatives designed to deliver benefits to stakeholders in the local and regional communities in a way that meets their needs and aspirations.
Community Benefit Scheme	<p>Neoen intends to be a long-term member of the Goorambat and wider Benalla LGA community. Neoen embraces its corporate social responsibility to contribute to local communities and seeks to maximise its contribution to improving the quality of life within the community within it operates. To do so, Neoen has established a Community Benefit Scheme to help build social assets and resources to support improve community development outcomes.</p> <p>Specific actions currently proposed under the Community Benefit Scheme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— A community Benefit Fund, providing a \$75,000 annual fund for eligible local projects.</li> <li>— Early-stage sponsorship of community activities (including sign sponsorship of the Goorambat Netball / Football Club and contribution to development of a playground in the Goorambat reserve).</li> <li>— \$15k fund directed towards school and trade scholarships for local students.</li> <li>— \$50k for local artwork.</li> <li>— Co-investment in the installation of a new mobile phone tower as part of the Telstra Black Spot Program.</li> <li>— 'Construction in the Community' program, providing in-kind construction / technical support for delivery of new community assets.</li> <li>— Development of a Neoen Learning Hub initiative for local and regional primary and high schools, providing energy and electricity education.</li> <li>— In-kind support for a 'Habitat Creation' program, an initiative run by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.</li> </ul> <p>During SIA consultation, participants were overall supportive of the range of initiatives proposed by Neoen to be delivered under the Project Community Benefit Scheme. Participants commented on other areas they would like to see Neoen explore as potential investment opportunities, several of which can be supported through the community benefit fund. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Contribution to signage along local roads to support Goorambat as a tourism destination</li> <li>— Landscaping to the entrance of Goorambat and within the existing recreation reserve.</li> <li>— Funds to support operation of the Veteran's Wife Café and the Veteran's retreat</li> <li>— Funding support for local sporting clubs and organisations.</li> </ul>

Plan / program	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– In-kind volunteer support to the Goorambat -Stewarton CFA through Neoen employee volunteering.</li> <li>– Supporting community programs that improve health and community wellbeing / socio-economic disadvantage.</li> <li>– Improving mobile and broadband internet access.</li> <li>– Supporting local arts and cultural projects.</li> </ul>
Community Complaints Management Mechanism	<p>Neoen believes that effective complaints management is integral to building communication, respect and trust between the Project and its stakeholders. As outlined in the Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan, Neoen will use several established communication mechanisms to record and report on all feedback and complaints that may be received during the planning, construction and operation of the Project. The Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan also outlines the Enquiries and Complaints Management Procedure that is in place, which sets out the timelines, accountabilities and process for managing community enquiries, complaints, disputes and grievances. The aim of the procedure is to ensure that all enquiries and complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively.</p>
Construction Management Plan	<p>A Construction Management Plan (CMP) will be developed by Neoen prior to Project construction. The CMP must be submitted to and approved by Benalla Rural City Council. The CMP will be in place until the completion of the construction phase and again be operationalised during decommissioning works. The CMP will include a range of measures to mitigate potential environmental impacts associated with construction / decommissioning, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– noise mitigation measures</li> <li>– measures to mitigate airborne dust, silt and debris onsite, both during and after the construction phase</li> <li>– erosion and sediment control measures</li> <li>– measures for management and removal of hazardous material</li> <li>– measures to manage on-site building waste equipment, machinery and/or earth storage/stockpiling during construction (including building waste on public and private land).</li> </ul> <p>It will also include management measures and procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency during construction and operation activities, such as fire, flooding or hazardous substances leaks and spills.</p>
Environmental Management Plan	<p>An Environmental Management Plan (EMP) will be developed by Neoen prior to Project operations. The EMP must be submitted to and approved by Benalla Rural City Council. The EMP must be reviewed and submitted to the Benalla Rural City Council for further approval every three years. The Council will have a right to request a review of the plan where it receives frequent and verified complaints from surrounding properties. The EMP will include a range of measures to mitigate potential environmental impacts associated with operations, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a pest animal and plant management plan</li> <li>– measures to protect native vegetation being retained on site and in the vicinity of the subject land, and measures to mitigate any consequential impacts on native vegetation retained</li> <li>– sediment and water run-off control measures</li> <li>– weed management and control</li> <li>– vehicle hygiene measures</li> <li>– appropriate stockpile and storage area management</li> <li>– a rehabilitation/revegetation plan and associated monitoring requirements.</li> </ul> <p>It will also include management measures and procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency during construction and operation activities, such as fire, flooding or hazardous substances leaks and spills.</p>
Host Landholder Payments	<p>Under the Lease Agreement, host landowners for the Project will be paid an annual fixed amount per hectare leased.</p>

Plan / program	Description
Landscape Screening Plan	Neoen will implement a Landscape Screening Plan to mitigate visual impacts identified by the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Hansen Partnerships 2019). Under the plan, buffer planting is proposed along the boundary of the site, roadways and sections of railway alignment to provide a visual buffer from surrounding areas to minimise impacts on visual amenity for nearby sensitive receptors, including the Goorambat Township. Landscaping will also be planted early in the construction stage and in accordance with any fire management plan arrangements, to avoid increased bushfire risk exposure.
Land access commitments	Prior to construction, the project will engage with host landholders about the standards and commitments regarding land access. Specific land access commitments will be discussed and agreed with each individual landholder.
Neighbour Construction Disruption Payments	Neoen will provide a construction disruption payment of \$10,000 to landholders within 500 metres of the Project AND who have been identified from technical assessments as likely to experience a medium to high environmental / amenity impacts at their place of residence during construction. In addition to a range of management measures to be implemented as part of the Project Environmental Management Plan, the payment will assist to mitigate potential impacts experienced by these stakeholders during construction.
Social Procurement Plan	Neoen is committed to maximising Project employment opportunities for residents within Goorambat and the wider Benalla District and for Indigenous people, women, and young people. Neoen is also committed to providing full, fair and reasonable opportunities for local, regional and Indigenous businesses and their participation in the Project's supply chain. To ensure these benefits are delivered, Neoen has developed a Social Procurement Plan which identifies the local content procurement approach, objectives and actions for the Project.
Traffic Management Plan	Neoen will prepare a Traffic Management Plan for both the construction and operations phase, which will include measures to reduce traffic safety risks and traffic disruptions. The Traffic Management Plan will specify the details of any intersection upgrades and local road improvement works to be undertaken by Neoen as a condition of the Planning Permit.
Workforce Code of Conduct	Neoen will implement a Code of Conduct, which will describe positive behavioural outcomes and prohibit negative behaviours. The Code of Conduct will apply to all Neoen personnel and contractors when they are at work, travelling to and from work, and in public places. It will include (but not be limited to) expected standards of workforce behaviour in public places, respect for local community values, and adherence with Neoen's zero tolerance for alcohol and other drugs (AOD) during roster.

## 5.2 Implementation and monitoring

Collectively, the management plans will mitigate the Project's social impacts and ensure that opportunities associated with the Project deliver long-term benefit for local and regional communities.

Due to the proposed life of the project (i.e. 30 years), it is expected that the associated social impacts may vary overtime, and may be experienced by stakeholders differently. Social impacts would be monitored on an ongoing basis by implementation of a complaints mechanisms and continued stakeholder and community engagement. A social monitoring program to track social and engagement outcomes of the project is outlined as part of the Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing Plan. The management strategies are ultimately adaptive and will be reviewed and updated by Neoen, as required.

While overall responsibility for development, implementation and monitoring of the social management plans will remain with Neoen, some responsibilities will be devolved to the construction contractor, and will become part of the contractor's terms and conditions of engagement. Neoen will have dedicated personnel to implement the management plans, coordinate ongoing stakeholder engagement and manage community investment initiatives.

Neoen will further prepare an annual report on the social and environmental performance of the Project for external communication purposes.

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