

Community Consultation Plan

WOLLAR SOLAR FARM

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES

Best practice community consultation involves the community in all decision making stages of a project. The community plays a role from project conception, through the assessment process and on to project development. Effective community consultation has three important functions:

1. It facilitates deeper understanding of issues and decisions required for the project;
2. It enhances the quality of decisions made for the project;
3. It allows people to contribute to decisions that affect their lives.

Important community engagement principles for a project include:

- Openness – combats assumptions and misinformation.
- Inclusiveness - consultation should be diverse and representative, not responding only to the most vocal stakeholders.
- Effective communication – requiring trust between parties and tools appropriate to the task.
- A communication strategy – clarity about what is being undertaken:
 - Inform - one-way communication to deliver information about the project.
 - Consult - two-way communication to seek input into the project.
 - Collaborate and involve – seek participation in elements of the project design and implementation.
- Early rather than late communication – to maximise engagement opportunities.
- Accountability – the process should be monitored and evaluated to ensure its aims are being achieved.

1.2 AIM OF THIS PLAN

This Community Consultation Plan (CCP) has been developed for the Wollar Solar Farm proposal.

The aim of the plan is to:

1. **Identify effective methods to inform the community about the Wollar Solar Farm**
2. **Facilitate engagement with the community, including allowing meaningful contributions from the community into the environmental assessment and project development.**
3. **Obtain social license to operate from the local community, allowing for good long-term relationships with community stakeholders**

The plan identifies:

- Community stakeholders for the project;
- Issues / risks related to the engagement of each stakeholder group;
- A consultation strategy for each stakeholder group;
- A set of consultation activities against the project development time line.

Effective engagement will require an understanding of community stakeholders and prioritisation of potential impacts. It also relies on the community understanding the project and specific issues of

interest to them, in order to contribute effectively. The focus of the consultation plan will be on providing this understanding and engagement.

1.3 STRUCTURE

The structure of this plan is:

1. Proposal overview
2. Identification of community stakeholders for the project
3. Issue management – what specific issues need consideration?
4. Project based activities – what activities will be undertaken to achieve the goals of this CCP?

1.4 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVISION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This plan has been developed to coincide with the early planning and assessment stages of the project.

If the project is approved, consultation will also be required to continue into the construction and operational phases of the project. These phases will require a new or updated plan, to reflect any changes to consultation objectives but also the increasing knowledge gained about the community. At this stage, only pre approval project stages are addressed.

1.5 RELEVANT GUIDELINES

This CCP has been prepared with reference to the following guidelines / references:

- *Establishing the social licence to operate large scale solar facilities in Australia: Insights from social research for industry*, Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).
- *Beyond Public Meetings: Connecting community engagement with decision making*, Twyford Consulting 2007.
- *Large-scale solar energy guideline draft for state significant development 2017*, NSW Government.

2 PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

2.1 WOLLAR SOLAR FARM

The proposed solar farm would be located on Lots 22-25,27, 30, 45, 49-51, 60-63, 69-80, 92, 105-107, 119 and 152-154 of DP 755430 and Lot 1 of DP 650653 on the western side of Barigan Road approximately 7 km south of Wollar Village. The proposal area would be located within the Mid-Western Regional Local Government Area (LGA). The proposed solar farm would connect to an existing substation approximately 900 m east of the site.

The proposed Wollar Solar Farm will generate up to 400 MW of renewable energy that would supply electricity to the national grid. The proposal area is approximately 800 ha and will consist of the following components occupying around half the area: a) around 1,000,000 solar panels mounted on either a fixed or single axis tracking system b) access to the site c) onsite access tracks d) operations and maintenance building with associated car parking e) an onsite electrical substation f) overhead and underground electrical cable reticulation g) energy storage facility h) security fencing and CCTV i) native vegetation planting to provide visual screening for specific receivers, if required.

The current access to the proposal area is via Maree Road. Access to Maree Road is via Barigan Road with both roads being unsealed. Wollar Road intersects Barigan Road approximately 7 km north of the intersection with Maree Road. An alternative access options from Barigan Road (near the existing TransGrid substation) will be considered subject to feasibility assessment.

A new substation will be constructed within the site boundary (likely in the north-east corner). An existing TransGrid 330kV transmission line transects the proposal area in the north eastern corner and will be used to connect the solar farm to the existing substation which is located about 900 m directly east of the proposal area.

2.2 CONSTRUCTION

The Wollar Solar Farm would be expected to operate for 30 years. The construction phase of the proposal would take approximately 18 months. After the initial 30-year operating period, the solar farm would either be decommissioned, removing all above ground infrastructure and returning the proposal area to its existing land capability, or repowered with new PV equipment subject to landowner and planning consents.

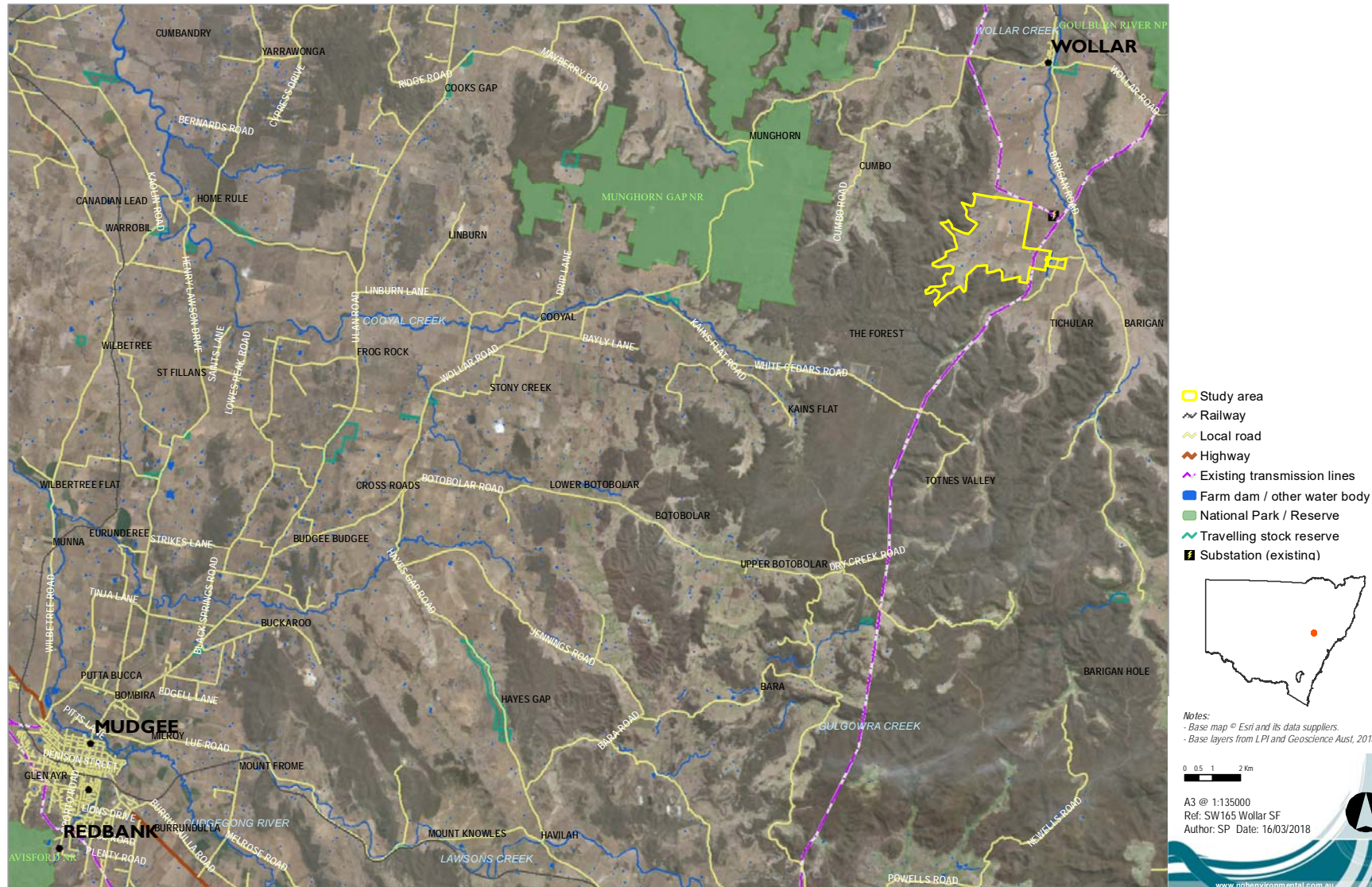


Figure 2-1 Site location

3 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Understanding the makeup and values of a community is essential to finding effective ways to reach the community. It is also important to understand ways which project may impact the community. This may not be limited to the construction and operational stages of a project but may also include the pre lodgement assessment phase, as the project is being shaped. This section provides a broad overview of the community demographics in the Mid-Western Local Government Area (LGA) and the local townships of Wollar, Mudgee and Cooyal.

3.1 MID-WESTERN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

The proposal area is located within the Mid-Western Regional Local Government Area (LGA), which covers 9,000 square kilometres. The 2016 census record indicates that the Mid-Western Regional LGA had a population of 24,569, which is a 9% increase since 2011; the median age is 41 (ABS 2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 3.9% of the population and 85.5% of people are Australian born.

There was 9,930 people employed in the Mid-Western region LGA labour force in 2016, with a median age of 43 for those working full-time. Coal mining employed the highest percentage of workers (12.0%). Other major industries were retail, agriculture and tourism (Mid-Western Regional Council).

The ABS Socio-Economic Indices For Areas (SEIFA) is a summary of social and economic data that provides a measure of relative disadvantage in relation to social conditions of people and households within a particular region. The SEIFA score ranges from 121 (most disadvantaged) to 1193 (least disadvantaged). The SEIFA score for the Mid-Western LGA in 2011 was 951 (ABS 2011). These indices of wellbeing indicate that the Mid-Western LGA have a relatively high standard of living without many social or economic disadvantages (ABS 2011).

The Mid-Western LGA includes the localities of Gulgong, Rylestone, Kandos, Wollar and Bylong. Each year, the region brings around 500,000 visitors to experience local food, wine, sporting and cultural events. Some of the main community and economic features for the Mid-Western LGA are:

- Education facilities, including 13 primary schools, four high schools, Mudgee TAFE and a number of private and community based childcare organisations.
- Health facilities, including a major hospital in Mudgee with a maternity ward, visiting specialists in medical centres, meals on wheels, healthy communities' activities program.
- Tourism attractions, including wine tasting, heritage museums, farmers markets, hot air ballooning, farm tours, miniature railway and kayak tours.
- Environmental attractions, including Putta Bucca Wetlands, Ferntree Gully, Windamere Dam and Dunns Swamp.
- Transport services, such as the Mudgee airport which provides flights to Sydney and Newcastle, trains and coaches.
- Recreational and sporting facilities, including the Glen Willow regional sporting centre, parks and sporting fields, showgrounds, swimming pools.
- Community facilities, including showgrounds, parks, saleyards, halls and libraries.
- Clubs, including pony clubs, car clubs, arts groups and fitness clubs.

Tourism events occur all year round and include, gardening fairs, arts, culture and heritage festivals, the Flavours of Mudgee festival, NRL matches, the Gulgong Folk Festival, Mudgee Bike Muster and public holiday celebrations.

3.2 WOLLAR

The closest village to the Wollar Solar Farm proposal area is Wollar. The proposal area is south of the village of Wollar, which is 316 km north west of Sydney and 38 km north east of Mudgee. The village has a general store (with post office and fuel), Community Hall, Rural Fire Service and a Public School (primary).

Wollar appears to have an aging workforce and has had a significant reduction in its population size over the last decade. It had a population of 69 people from twelve families in 2016. This is a population decrease of 77% since 2006. The total employment estimate in Wollar as at the 2016 Census was 82% with the leading employment being the mining and agriculture industries, followed by retail and education (ABS 2017). Workers in Wollar are predominantly in the 35 to 44 (19.2%) and 45 to 64 (53.8%) year age groups with 15.3% of workers age between 20 to 24 and 11.5% between 25 to 34.

The village is approximately 5 km south east from the Wilpinjong coal mine site that was approved in 2006. Since then, the Wilpinjong owner Peabody Energy has received an approval (April 2017) for a further mine expansion to approximately 1.5 km from the village and about 9 km from the proposal area. There are currently a small number of privately-owned properties in Wollar village.

3.3 MUDGEE

Mudgee is approximately 38 km from the solar farm proposal area and is the closest large regional center. In 2015, there were approximately 1,182 businesses in Mudgee. The town services include banks, supermarkets, accommodation, post office, medical centres, hospital and airport. Mudgee is host to a variety of community and sporting events throughout the year, and is well known for its premium wineries, making it a regional hub for tourism.

The population in (ABS) 2016 was 10,923 people, which is 44.4% of the Mid-Western Region LGA. The median age was 38, and the median personal income was \$623. The employment rate was 92% with the most common occupation being technicians and trade workers (16.5%), labourers (14%), professionals (14%), managers (13.1%) and sales workers (12.6%). Major employment industries in Mudgee include school education, cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services, coal mining, supermarket and grocery stores and accommodation.

3.4 COOYAL

Cooyal is approximately 22km from the solar farm proposal area and services include accommodation at the Old Cooyal Hotel and a fire station.

In 2016, Cooyal had a population of 114 people and an employment rate of 75.4%. Workers in Ulan are predominantly 35 – 44 (19.7%), 65 – 74 (18.6%), and 45- 54 (17.4%). Workers aged over 75 made up 13.9% of the workforce. Mining, construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing were the most common industries.

4 STAKEHOLDER GROUPS AND CONSULTATION STRATEGIES

It is important to identify key stakeholder groups and relevant characteristics of the groups in order to tailor engagement strategies to suit them. Different levels of engagement will be appropriate to different groups, depending on the potential interest or impacts on the groups:

- Where impacts are minor, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) consultation spectrum suggests approaches such as ‘Inform’ and ‘Consult’.
- Greater impacts on communities require approaches such as ‘Involve’, ‘Collaborate’ and ‘Empower’.

Proposed strategies are set out below for each stakeholder group. Levels of engagement may change, depending on issues identified during the consultation process.

Table 4-1 Stakeholder group consultation strategies

Stakeholder group	Defining characteristics	Consultation strategies
1. Adjacent neighbours	<p>Neighbours on subject land adjacent to the project for example: those with a view of infrastructure, or have potential for noise or vibration from the haulage route or construction activities.</p> <p>1 residence is located within 2km of the site that is currently owned by the site land owner. It is likely that this residence along with the site will be purchased by the proponent.</p>	<p>Inform, consult, involve, collaborate</p> <p>Face to face consultation and direct feedback is required.</p> <p>Mitigation strategies may require changes to the project or the development of specific plans of management i.e. screening visual impact.</p> <p>All consultation should be documented.</p>
2. Near neighbours and residents of Wollar community	<p>Impacts for this group would be less than adjacent neighbours, but being a major development close to a small settlement, direct impacts may be of great interest to residents. This is a large development with potential to define the locality in some ways.</p> <p>This is particularly relevant given the exposure of this group to other large developments such as the Wilpinjong coal mine and proposed Bylong coal mine.</p> <p>Very few habitable dwellings are located within 7km of the site, however a level of direct impact may be experienced.</p>	<p>Inform and consult</p> <p>Understanding the values and potential impacts to this group is highly important. It will assist the assessment process and development of appropriate mitigation strategies and in gaining social license to operate from the local community.</p> <p>The opportunity for face to face consultation and direct feedback should be provided upon request.</p> <p>All consultation should be documented.</p>

Stakeholder group	Defining characteristics	Consultation strategies
3. Small Local Businesses	As above, being a major development close to a small settlement, direct impacts may be of great interest to businesses. There will be opportunities as well as potential impacts to consider. Businesses may also assist to spread information about the project and can be influential in a developing public opinion.	<p>Inform and consult</p> <p>Understanding the values and potential impacts to this group is highly important. It will assist the assessment process and development of appropriate mitigation strategies and in gaining social license to operate from the local community.</p> <p>The opportunity for face to face consultation and direct feedback should be provided upon request.</p> <p>Potential opportunity to distribute project information and understand community sentiment.</p> <p>All consultation should be documented.</p>
4. Large local employer / land use	Cumulative impacts may be relevant to other large scale projects in the area. Wilpinjong coal mine is located approximately 15km from the site and may experience direct impact during construction activities. The mine is operated by Peabody Energy.	<p>Inform and consult</p> <p>Specific information may be required from this group to understand impacts of the project (i.e. haulage routes, accommodation for construction staff).</p> <p>An avenue to receive information and provide specific feedback or ask questions should be provided.</p>
5. Representative bodies	Representatives of groups such as: Mid-Western Regional Council Mudgee Chamber of Commerce Mudgee Local Aboriginal Land Council	<p>Inform</p> <p>Specific information may be required for this group.</p> <p>An avenue to receive information and provide specific feedback or ask questions should be provided.</p>
6. Media	Outlets to ensure a clear and consistent message is delivered to the broader community: Local radio, television, newspapers.	<p>Inform</p> <p>May be used to reach the broader community.</p> <p>A contact should be provided to these outlets, so further information can be provided if required.</p>
7. Special interest groups	There may be benefit in contacting special interest groups, to ensure that any special areas of interest will be addressed in the assessment of the project. Local information can be important. A number were identified specific to this proposal. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wollar Progress Association • Mudgee District Environmental Group 	<p>Inform</p> <p>These should be specifically contacted.</p> <p>Specific information or assessment may be required to understand and mitigate impacts for these groups.</p> <p>An avenue to provide feedback or ask questions should be provided.</p>

Stakeholder group	Defining characteristics	Consultation strategies
8. Broader community	<p>It is important to ensure a clear and consistent message is delivered to the broader community.</p> <p>There may be opportunities and impacts to the broader community that are important to understand during the assessment of the project.</p> <p>Accommodation and services for project construction staff and other economic matters may be of interest.</p>	<p>Inform</p> <p>Newsletters, advertisements, website information used to relay information about the project.</p> <p>A contact should be provided to this group, for further information / provision of feedback.</p>

5 ISSUE MANAGEMENT

A set of project-specific issues and risks to maximising community engagement in the project have been identified below. These issues pose potential risks to the effective identification and mitigation of impacts important to the community and ultimately, to achieving social license to operate from the community. Strategies have been developed below, specific to the identified issues. These have been incorporated into the Project-based Activities, in Section 6.

Table 5-1 Risks and strategies

Issue	Risks	Strategies
The project may define / overwhelm the locality / village of Wollar	This may polarise the community. They may not feel that the project reflects their values. The scale of the project may overwhelm the existing local character.	Early dissemination of information about the project and its specific justification and benefits, particularly with reference to developing new income streams on agricultural land and the ability to restore the land capability after decommissioning. This may include material about the role of solar energy in the country's energy mix, the technology and its impacts. Particularly, visualisations (representative montages) can assist to understand the actual versus perceived impacts. Seek direct input into how the project may reflect the communities 'personality' and values. How the benefits of the project may be spread to the local community. Clear communication of key environmental impacts and mitigation strategies of the project. Offer direct contact with project manager.
Cumulative impacts with local mines	Impacts to and from Wilpinjong coal mine during construction	Early dissemination of information about the project Seek direct input into how the project may operations of the mine Offer direct contact with project manager.
Misinformation / left out of engagement	Feel left out, disengaged, misinformed Rural residences can be difficult to contact and word of mouth travels very fast in small communities.	Direct communication early to local community – adjacent landowners first, near neighbours second, then the wider community. Multiple means to identify all relevant residences undertaken – mapping, Council, engagement with other members of the community.

Issue	Risks	Strategies
Lack of support for project	<p>Lack of interest, leading to low levels of public support.</p> <p>Unaddressed concerns may generate opponents of this project.</p> <p>Large proportion of jobs in local area are reliant on coal mining may influence support of development of renewable infrastructure.</p>	<p>Early dissemination of information about the project and its justification and benefits.</p> <p>Clear communication of key environmental impacts and mitigation strategies.</p> <p>Make participation easy – to ensure all concerns are addressed.</p> <p>Be creative – seek support for renewable project that demonstrates how benefits are felt at the local level.</p> <p>Look for opportunities – ways the project could benefit local businesses, for example.</p>
The approvals process can be long and complex.	<p>Perception that the process is too difficult to become involved in.</p> <p>Suspicion that input will not be valued.</p> <p>Overly technical information provided, use of jargon.</p>	<p>Clearly illustrate approvals process.</p> <p>Clearly define opportunities for community input including what is required and when it is required.</p> <p>Communicate back, identifying where input has been used.</p> <p>Reinforce this at each relevant stage for community input – pre lodgement, during public exhibition etc.</p> <p>Milestone events should be identified early and celebrated.</p>
Distrust in environmental assessment process.	Distrust of impact identification and mitigation strategies.	<p>Establish credentials of assessment team and Wollar Solar Development Pty Ltd. Present these in the EIS and in newsletters etc.</p> <p>Make participation easy – create opportunities to discuss issues with the team.</p>
Representative	<p>Risk of biased consultation, serving only the ‘squeaky wheel’.</p> <p>Sections of the community may be “overpowered” and may be marginalised.</p>	<p>Ensure community is engaged in a forum that minimises risk of debate being side tracked.</p> <p>Follow up with smaller groups where required.</p> <p>Use established social (and media) channels in dissemination of materials, i.e. sport clubs.</p>
Unified message	Differing messages may create confusion and mistrust.	<p>Limit points of contact.</p> <p>Have message clearly set out for use, rather than reinventing it for each consultation activity.</p>
Unequal distribution of benefits	Residents close to the development are likely to feel more strongly.	Identification of stakeholder groups should reflect differences in impacts.

6 PROJECT BASED ACTIVITIES

The following table outlines the different project stages and associated community consultation objectives and activities, in chronological order. The stages include:

- Decision to proceed with early investigations, proposal development
- Receipt of EIS format and content requirements from DPE
- Detailed assessment and proposal development
- EIS on public exhibition, submissions reporting

Further stages apply post approval.

During this progression, mile stone events should be celebrated, and used as an opportunity to keep the community on board. Milestones can include:

1. Announce project – notify near residents first, follow up with consistent information
2. Early studies update – meet the community face to face
3. EIS submitted – explain avenues for input
4. Approval – celebrate in a way that involves the community

Further milestones apply post approval.

Table 6-1 Proposed engagement activities

Stakeholder group	Issue	Consultation objective	Community engagement targets	Format
Decision to proceed with early investigations, proposal development, and receipt of SEARs				
Adjacent landowners	Misinformation / left out of engagement Lack of support for project	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	Early dissemination of information about solar development generally. Early dissemination of information about the project and its justification and benefits. Seek direct input to include in assessment approach and development of proposal.	Face to face meetings with Project Manager. Encourage ongoing direct contact with Project Manager.
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	Misinformation / left out of engagement May define locality Lack of support Unequal distribution of benefits	Inform and consult	Early dissemination of information about solar development generally. Early dissemination of information about the project and its justification and benefits. General feeling toward solar development	Newsletter introduction to the project, contact number provided and supplementary information on website Provide opportunity for follow up call by Project Manager if requested.
Local small business owners	Misinformation / left out of engagement Lack of support for project	Inform and consult	Build relationship with these owners and staff as they may assist to 'get the word out'. Discuss specific impacts and opportunities.	Face to face meeting / direct contact with Project Manager. Encourage ongoing direct contact with Project Manager.
Large local employer / land use	Impacts to and from Wilpinjong coal mine during construction	Inform and consult	Ensure that the information is available to Peabody Energy. Discuss specific impacts and opportunities.	Face to face meeting / direct contact with Project Manager. Encourage ongoing direct contact with Project Manager.

Stakeholder group	Issue	Consultation objective	Community engagement targets	Format
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	Distrust in environmental assessment process The approvals process can be complex.	Inform	Preliminary project announcement, including stage of assessment, likely timelines, ways in which the community can be involved. Ensure the timelines and the stages for community input are clearly documented - use graphics and indicate where we are now at for the assessment. Make information on the project team and assessment team available	Newsletter to include graphic showing stage of the process and opportunities for input Website, links to other projects / accreditations
Broader community	Distrust in environmental assessment process The approvals process can be complex.	Inform		Media release, link to website (including newsletter)
Detailed assessment and proposal development				
Adjacent landowners	Lack of support	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	Discuss and understand specific impacts on these receivers. Feed information into the final assessment to ensure all their issues have been identified and addressed by the project.	Face to face meeting / Phone call
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	May define locality Lack of support	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	Identify ways the community can participate in the project and seek input on these: Vegetation screen planting, adopt a tree (one for project, one for landowner?) Signage / logo for solar farm (will be prominent part of the village?) Other renewable or energy saving programs that the proponent could support?	Competitions, Adopt a tree, other programs

Stakeholder group	Issue	Consultation objective	Community engagement targets	Format
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	Distrust in environmental assessment process. Unequal distribution of benefits Risk of biased consultation, serving only the 'squeaky wheel'.	Inform and consult	Update community on detailed project, its impacts Seek input – any additional concerns, input into visual assessment if required. Meet specialists Feed information into the final assessment to ensure all community issues have been identified and addressed by the project, differentiating between stakeholder groups	Open house information day (provide links to relevant information, provision of feedback forms - also now on website)
Broader community	Representative	Inform and consult	Outline ways they can continue to have input into project Seek broad feedback on how the community feels about solar farms generally and this project specifically.	Media release, link to website (including feedback form)
EIS on public exhibition, submissions reporting				
Adjacent landowners	Relationship with landowners and community	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	Update on project status.	Phone call update
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	Relationship with community	Inform and consult	Update on project status. Outline ways they can continue to have input into project	Newsletter update
Broader community	The approvals process can be long and complex.	Inform	Update on project status. Outline ways they can continue to have input into project	Media release
Approval determination				
Adjacent landowners	Relationship with landowners and community	Inform, consult, involve, collaborate	Update on project status.	Phone call update

Stakeholder group	Issue	Consultation objective	Community engagement targets	Format
Near neighbours and Wollar local community	Relationship with community	Inform	Update on project status. Thank the community for their involvement	Media release Website
Broader community	Relationship with community	Inform		

7 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To ensure this plan is effective during the implementation of activities, and adapts as required to new information, the following review actions will be undertaken alongside implementation activities:

- Appoint and maintain a consultation manager for the project to implement activities and review this plan regularly.
- Keep an accurate record of all feedback from consultation activities and all correspondence with the community.
- Monitor regularly and respond promptly to email and phone queries.
- Monitor if the activities reaching a diverse and representative section of the community; do new activities need to be implemented?
- Has relevant information been passed back to:
 - Those developing the detailed project description
 - Assessment staff.

8 REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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