

Bookaar Solar Farm
Landscape and Visual Impact Statement: Review of Changes

FINAL
November 2020

Bookaar Renewables Pty Ltd

Bookaar Solar Farm

Project No: IS293600
Document Title: Landscape and Visual Impact Statement
Document No.:
Revision: Final
Date: 01 November 2020
Client Name: Bookaar Renewables Pty Ltd
Client No: Bookaar Renewables
Project Manager: Alex Elliott
Author: Hayden Burge
File Name: Bookaar_Reapplication_LVIA Review_FINAL_14.10.2020

Jacobs Group (Australia) Pty Limited
ABN 37 001 024 095
Floor 11, 452 Flinders Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
PO Box 312, Flinders Lane
Melbourne VIC 8009 Australia
T +61 3 8668 3000
F +61 3 8668 3001
www.jacobs.com

© Copyright 2019 Jacobs Group (Australia) Pty Limited. The concepts and information contained in this document are the property of Jacobs. Use or copying of this document in whole or in part without the written permission of Jacobs constitutes an infringement of copyright.

Limitation: This document has been prepared on behalf of, and for the exclusive use of Jacobs' client, and is subject to, and issued in accordance with, the provisions of the contract between Jacobs and the client. Jacobs accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for, or in respect of, any use of, or reliance upon, this document by any third party.

Document history and status

Revision	Date	Description	Author	Checked	Reviewed	Approved
1.0	07.07.2020	Draft: LVIA Review of Changes	SM	HB	DN	HB
2.0	27.08.2020	Review	SM	HB	DN	HB
3.0	01.09.2020	Review	HB	DS	DN	HB
4.0	20.09.2020	Review	HB	DS	DN	HB
5.0	28.09.2020	Review	HB	DS	DN	HB
6.0	01.11.2020	Final Issue	HB	DS	DN	HB

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Report Methodology	2
1.2	Assumptions and limitations.....	2
2.	New Proposal (2020 Application)	3
3.	Considerations and findings of the VCAT Tribunal	5
3.1	Impact to Landscape Character.....	5
3.2	Impact on Private realm views.....	6
3.3	Meningoort Homestead/ Eugene Von Gerard	6
3.4	Buffer width and planting.....	7
4.	Review of key Project features.....	8
4.1	Site layout.....	9
4.2	Proposed Panels.....	1
4.3	Inverters.....	2
4.4	Substation, battery storage and operations buildings	3
4.5	Access Tracks.....	5
4.6	Site Access	5
4.7	Security Fencing	6
4.8	Landscape Screen.....	6
4.9	Summary of the proposes changes	8
5.	Planning and Policy: Review of Changes.....	9
5.1	Zones	9
5.2	Solar Energy Facilities – Design and Development Guideline (August 2019)	10
5.3	Planning controls and policy conclusion.....	12
6.	Landscape and Visual Assessment of the New Proposal	13
6.1	Publicly Accessible Viewpoints.....	13
6.2	Photomontages	14
6.2.1	Viewpoint 1 – Mt Leura Lookout.....	17
6.2.2	Viewpoint 2 – Camperdown Botanic Gardens	19
6.2.3	Viewpoint 3 – Park Lane.....	21
6.2.4	Viewpoint 4 – Princes Highway.....	22
6.2.5	Viewpoint 5 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #1.....	23
6.2.6	Viewpoint 6 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #2.....	24
6.2.7	Viewpoint 7 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #3.....	26
6.2.8	Viewpoint 8 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #4.....	29
6.2.9	Viewpoint 9 – Kilnoorat Road.....	30
6.2.10	Viewpoint 10 – Meningoort Homestead.....	31
6.3	Publicly accessible viewpoints conclusion.....	33
6.4	Residential dwellings.....	35

7.	Assessment of the new Proposal in line with the Guideline.....	37
7.1.1	Siting facility components.....	37
7.1.2	Landscape Screening.....	38
7.1.3	Designing security measures.....	39
7.2	Impacts on landscape values	39
8.	Conclusion	41

Appendix A. Site Layout

Appendix B. Photomontages

B.1 Reapplication Photomontage

B.2 Previous Application Photomontage

Appendix C. Draft Landscape Plan

**Appendix D. Expert Witness Statement: Visual Impact, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Final
May 28, 2019**

1. Introduction

Purpose

Jacobs has been engaged by Bookaar Renewables Pty Ltd (the 'Proponent') to provide an assessment of the potential Landscape and visual impacts for a new proposed solar farm (the 'Proposal') on land at 520 Meningoort Road, Bookaar (the 'Site'). This report provides a landscape and visual assessment with regard to the Solar Energy Facilities – Design and Development Guideline issued by DELWP in 2019, with the benefit of having provided an Expert Witness Statement (the 'EWS') for a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hearing (Bookaar Renewables Pty Ltd v Corangamite SC [2019] VCAT 1244), in relation to a past proposal for a solar farm (the 'Previous Application') located on the same site, within the same development footprint, of the same scale (200 MWac).

Background and Previous Assessment

A Previous Application for a solar farm at the Site was the subject of a 2019 VCAT hearing, following the refusal of a planning permit application by the Corangamite Shire Council in 2018. The Proponent engaged Jacobs to provide an EWS for the VCAT Hearing, which reviewed the Landscape and Visual Assessment for the Previous Application (Tract, 2018) and undertook further detailed assessment. The LVIA and EWS for the Previous Application are provided in Appendix B.

With respect to Landscape and Visual Impacts the VCAT Tribunal concluded that the visual impacts associated with the Previous Application, which included an assessment of potential off-site amenity impacts due to glint and glare, and the loss of native vegetation, were acceptable and would not bring about an unacceptable change in views, visual impact or a change in the landscape character of the area.

This was consistent with the EWS which concluded that the Previous Application would not pose an unacceptable impact on the regional or local landscape, stating that:

'.....the panels which have been modelled at four meters in height, sit low within the landscape and will not be visually prominent. This is due to the low-lying nature of the site and the low profile of the panels which mould to the contours of the land and the subject site. Further, the distance for any sensitive receptors or key view is at such a distance that the panels will not be a dominant feature in the view'¹.

However, ultimately the VCAT hearing for the Previous Application was unsuccessful, noting that the decision was not based on landscape and visual matters. In response to the VCAT decision, the Proponent has decided to submit a fresh application addressing the deficiencies identified in the VCAT decision, in particular, providing more detail on the location of infrastructure within the Site, and incorporating the findings of a bushfire risk assessment and a hydrology assessment into the final design. This process has resulted in a refinement of the Previous Application requiring a small number of changes to the design of the Proposal, which are discussed in detail in Section 5. Importantly, with respect to the visual assessment, the proposed activity remains the same, the development is proposed over the same time frame of 30 years, and it is designed entirely within the same footprint as the Previous Application.

¹ Bookaar Solar Farm, Bookaar Renewables Pty Ltd, Expert Witness Statement, Visual Impact, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, FINAL, May 28, 2019, Page 53.

1.1 Report Methodology

This report will:

- Summarise the key findings of the Tribunal concerning visual impact, landscape character and heritage values;
- Review the changes made to the plans associated with Planning Permit Application No P2390/2018 and, the plans for the new Proposal;
- Review any changes to the planning scheme and guidelines that may be relevant to the new Proposal;
- Describe any changes to views and visual impact resulting from the amended plans or newly introduced policies; and
- Review the new Proposal against the new DELWP guidelines *Solar Energy Facilities Design and Development Guidelines, July 2019* (the Guideline).

1.2 Assumptions and limitations

This report does not consider any changes to the landscape setting and views, as a result of vegetation clearing, areas of new plantings or growth of existing plantings that may have occurred since visits to the Site (undertaken June 2019) and surrounds as part of Planning Permit Application P2390/2018.

2. New Proposal (2020 Application)

The Proposal involves the installation of a solar energy facility with a capacity of 200 MWac (282 MWdc). The Proposal includes the following elements (see the 'Site Plan'):

- 'Array Areas', containing Photovoltaic (PV) panels mounted on a single axis tracking system with a maximum height of 4 m above natural ground at maximum tilt. The tracking system would be supported by piles driven into the ground. Row spacing is either 12.75 m or 13 m (pile to pile);
- 82 inverters located centrally throughout the Site in pairs at 41 locations across the Site (inverter stations). Inverter stations are located at least x m from the Site boundary;
- Below ground cabling connecting the PV panels between trackers and inverters;
- Below ground cabling connecting the inverters to the substation;
- An internal track network of all-weather gravel tracks (4 m), including a perimeter track which forms part of a 10 m wide defensible Asset Protection Zone (APZ) that surrounds the Site;
- Four (4) gated main site access points via Meningoort Road;
- Four (4) gated emergency access points along the western boundary of the Site;
- Eight dedicated water tanks for firefighting (maximum of 3.6m high), located adjacent to each access point;
- A perimeter security fence 2.5 m high (chain mesh);
- Perimeter vegetation screens (20 m wide with 4 rows of trees and maintained to a height of at least 4 m), planted on the outside of the security fencing.
- Agricultural style fencing 1.2 m high around the perimeter of the vegetation screens and the perimeter of existing vegetation along the Site's western boundary;
- A SCADA system that will gather, monitor and analyse data generated through operating the Proposal;
- On-demand, downward facing lighting (restricted to 4m in height); and
- Sensor triggered CCTV security cameras located around the perimeter of the Site and adjacent to key infrastructure.

Substation Area (1.76 ha, see 'Site Plan, Appendix A'):

- Substation connecting the Proposal to the onsite 220KV transmission line, via two (2) new high voltage (HV) 220 kV transmission lines;
- A Control building (3 m high);
- Substation Operations and Maintenance building (up to 5 m high);
- A security fence (chain mesh) up to 2.5 m high, enclosing the Substation;
- A 10 m wide defensible APZ around the perimeter of the Substation; and
- Parking for 5 vehicles.

Battery Area (0.91 ha, see 'Site Plan', Appendices 'A' and 'C')

- A series of separate containerised battery units, connected by underground cables to the Substation (approximately 2.5 m high);
- A separate transformer adjacent to each battery; and
- A 10m defensible APZ around the perimeter of the Battery Area.

Operations Buildings Area (area 0.96 ha, see 'Site Plan, Appendix D'):

- A Site office building including amenities with a height of 3.6 m;

Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

- A maintenance building and workshop with a height of 5 m;
- 3 Storage sheds with a height of 4.1 m;
- Car parking for twelve (12) vehicles;
- A septic tank and potable water tank; and
- A defendable APZ of 20 m, which allows the area to function as the nominated 'Shelter in Place' location (see Bushfire Risk Assessment and Mitigation Plan).

In addition to the key components outlined above, there will be a temporary construction compound (1.44 ha, see the Site Plan) to facilitate the construction phase of the Proposal. The construction compound would include:

- Temporary construction offices (up to 5 m high);
- Car and bus parking areas for construction vehicles (51 workers cars, 5 mini vans; and additional parking space provided for delivery vehicles and construction machinery);
- Staff amenity block including portable toilets, showers and a kitchen, designed for peak staff numbers during the construction period; and
- Laydown areas.

Once the Proposal is operational, the construction compound will be decommissioned and revegetated.

The Proposal has a lifespan of 30 years. Construction would take place over approximately 12 months and require up to 150 construction workers. The operational phase would be approximately 28 years and generate approximately 10 full-time positions nationally, with six positions likely to be based locally. Decommissioning is expected to take 12 months and would require a similar workforce to the construction period. Following decommissioning, all infrastructure associated with the solar farm would be removed from the Site.

Features of the Proposal that are relevant to visual impact and landscape character are described in Section 4.

The following section reviews the key findings from VCAT Hearing P2390/2018 concerning the re-assessment of the visual impacts of the Proposal.

3. Considerations and findings of the VCAT Tribunal

The concerns of the local community were considered in detail by the VCAT Tribunal. The following section reviews key landscape and visual impact considerations for the Previous Application that may be relevant to the re-assessment of the visual impacts of any new proposal at the site. VCAT Tribunal key issues relevant to landscape and visual impacts are set out from paragraph 24 of the Tribunal's Report. The following is an extract of the report on these key issues for visual impact:

'Whether the proposal's visual impact is acceptable in terms of the public and private realms. This includes specific views, vistas, the broader landscape, residential and farming properties within the vicinity of the subject land, as well as views painted by important landscape artist Eugene Von Gerard some 150 years ago.'

Paragraphs 66-68 of the Tribunal Report addresses the *Draft Solar Energy Facilities Design and Development Guidelines* (the 'Guidelines') and discusses in part the role of the Guidelines in selecting suitable sites for solar farms similar in nature to this Proposal. On this, the Tribunal notes that:

Some parties submit the site does not meet all of the criteria set-out in the then Draft Solar Farm Guidelines, however there is not a need or mandatory requirement for every site to be determined to fit 'ideal' criteria.

At paragraph 68 The Tribunal states:

There is no 'checklist' identifying all of the site features make a site appropriate for a solar energy facility. A site's strategic and specific circumstances must be assessed, with opportunities, constraints and impacts being identified. The scheme provisions and policies set out the matters we must consider. The types of considerations in the draft Solar Guidelines align with these.

The Tribunal's considerations towards visual and landscape considerations and views painted by Eugene Von Gerard are set-out at paragraphs 130 through 162 of the Tribunal's Report. The Tribunal's findings on these matters are discussed in paragraphs 163 through 203.

With regard to landscape impacts, the primary focus of the opponents to Planning Permit Application No. P2390/2018 was the potential for the proposed development to negatively impact on the amenity of the area, views of significant landscapes and views from nearby residential dwellings. In relation to these concerns, the Tribunal stated in their findings that:

'We are not persuaded that a permit should be refused because of concerns that the solar facility is at odds with the rural character and ambience...and that ...the visual impact is not unacceptable and will not intrude unreasonably on the features in SLO1' (para. 188).

The findings of the Tribunal concerning features identified by SLO1 of the Corangamite Shire Planning Scheme are relevant to the submitter's concerns regarding impacts to landscape character and views towards significant landscapes. It is the purpose of SLO's specifically to identify landscape features that are significant or unique, describe their uniqueness and to provide guidance to protect these features.

The following sections summarise key findings in the Tribunal's report for the Previous Application that are pertinent to a review of any proposed amendments to a solar farm at the Site, in this case, the (new) Proposal.

3.1 Impact to Landscape Character

The fundamental concern raised in opponent's submissions was the potential for the solar farm proposed by the Previous Application to negatively impact on the amenity of the area and views of significant landscapes. These locations include landscape features, and views that are identified in the South West Victorian Landscape Assessment, June 2013 (SWLVAS), and natural features such as volcanic rises and lakes that are situated within area noted by Significant Overlay's (SLO's) within the Corangamite Planning Scheme.

The Tribunal noted:

for such a large facility, opportunities to see it from the public realm are limited to the local road network, the Darlington Road, and elevated viewpoints associated with volcanic cones' (VCAT Report, para. 163).

Key findings and observations made by the Tribunal from these areas are set out below.

Views from Darlington Road:

- *'Notwithstanding the substantial length of the facility, the facility would not have an unreasonable visual impact. This is because of the low profile of the solar arrays and the distance between the viewer and the facility. While Mr Burge's evidence is that the impact is acceptable without perimeter landscape screening, we accept with [sic] his opinion that proposed vegetation would reduce the visibility of the facility over time' (Para. 167).*
- *'The solar energy facility and its landscaping will appear as a foreground element to Mt Meningoort. The breadth of the facility will be understood. However, this does not equate to an unacceptable degree of prominence or intrusion so as to adversely affect or undermine the values attributed to the SLO1. We do not consider the proposal would detract from the tourist experience in a significant way' (Para. 168).*
- *'We further accept Mr Burge's assessment that, to the extent that infrastructure such as a substation would be seen, it would not be a dominant or unacceptable visual intrusion' (Para. 169).*

In views from Park Lane:

'We accept Mr Burge's assessment that although the solar facility may be visible, it will not be a dominant element. Proposed landscaping would further filter views and limit visibility over time' (Para. 171).

In views from Mt Leura:

'The proposed facility will not be a substantial element in this broader context and panorama. We agree with Mr Burge that it would appear as part of the diverse agricultural landscape which changes seasonally depending on the agricultural regime' (Para. 174), and that ... 'while a foreground element to the volcanic cone of Mt Meningoort, we do not consider the low-lying but wide development is such an intrusion and distraction in the views and landscape so as to conclude the outcome is unacceptable' (Para. 175).

In views from Lake Gnotuk and Bullen Merri Lookout:

'We agree with Mr Burge that, from this point, the proposed development would not be visible. Therefore, it would not compete with key views towards these features. Views to the north towards the subject land are screened by existing topography and vegetation' (Para. 178).

3.2 Impact on Private realm views

The Tribunal, in assessing the impacts to private realm views, stated:

'The impacts on residential amenity and outlook do not warrant refusal of a permit. We accept Mr Burge's analysis that the proposed landscape plantings around the site boundary will mitigate views that could be gained from dwellings east and south of the subject land' (Para. 187).

3.3 Meningoort Homestead/ Eugene Von Gerard

In relation to the change in views captured in a painting by Eugene Von Gerard, the Tribunal's findings were that:

'We do not accept submissions that the proposed development will negatively impact on the Heritage Overlay or SLO1 (Mt Meningoort). We are unable to agree that the proposed development will adversely affect the integrity of the heritage place and its setting. Just because the solar facility could be seen, to varying degrees from the heritage-listed land and place, this does not equate to an unacceptable [sic] adverse [sic] effect on the place' (Para. 202).

This position is supported by the following statements:

- *'The view from this location is altered from the image painted by Von Gerard, with matured trees and paddocks beyond.*
- *The iconic Von Gerard view, and views from the Mt Meningoort volcanic cone, are from the mountain slope behind the dwelling and are not generally available to the public. The limited public access is a relevant consideration.*
- *The solar energy facility would be masked from this location, by the plantings on the Meningoort property.*
- *Closer to the gardens immediately associated with the Homestead the solar energy facility would not be obvious or dominant. It would be effectively masked by vegetation' (Para. 203).*

3.4 Buffer width and planting

Planning Permit s Application P2390/2018 proposed a 20 m wide landscape screen to filter views to the Site from sensitive viewing locations. The landscape screening plan proposed native species to be installed as tube stock in up to seven rows. The EWS concluded that four rows of trees would be sufficient. It was put forward by opponents that the landscape buffer should be of 50 m in width to match existing plantings found elsewhere at Meningoort Homestead.

In relation to landscape screening, the Tribunal stated in their findings that:

- *'We are satisfied that landscaping within a 20 metre wide buffer, as proposed, is acceptable and sufficient. We have not been persuaded that a 50 metre wide buffer is required to mitigate impacts nor is there a planning reason to match landscape belts on the balance of the Meningoort property' (Para. 191).*
- *'We agree with Mr Kern that tube stock be used. That could take the form of four or seven rows, but a minimum of four appears appropriate when assessing the information and evidence' (Para 193).*

Based on the above review of the Tribunal's findings, it is apparent that a review of a revised proposal for a solar farm at the same site at the Previous Application must consider the extent of the project footprint, the height of the proposed panels, the location of key infrastructure and the provision of landscape screening comprising 20 m in width and a minimum of four rows of trees external to the perimeter fencing and within the Site's boundaries.

4. Review of key Project features

This section will review the key features of this new Proposal against those of the Previous Application which formed the basis of the VCAT Tribunal's findings.

The preceding section reviewed the considerations and findings of the VCAT Tribunal for the Previous Application, who were

... 'not persuaded that a permit should be refused because of concerns that the solar facility is at odds with the rural character and ambience'. Further, the Tribunal stated that 'the visual impact is not unacceptable and will not intrude unreasonably on the features in SLO1 (Para. 188)...and...we do not consider the proposal would fundamentally change the rural and agricultural character associated with farmland that sits between cones west of the lakes and wetlands' (Para. 190).

Key Project Features

The revised application seeks to develop a 200 MWac solar farm approximately 8 km north-west of the centre of Camperdown at 520 Meningoort Road, Lots 51 and 52 and Res1 on LP5677 and adjacent parts of Meningoort Road, Bookaar. The solar farm output, site location, site boundary and specific property details are the same as the Previous Application.

Table 4-1 summarises a comparison of the key features and components of the Previous Application and the refined layout of the new Proposal.

Table 4-1 Key Project features

Planning Permit Application P2390/2018	Revised Proposal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately 700,000 solar panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Approximately 641,000 solar panels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall height of the solar arrays - 4.0 m 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall height of the solar arrays - 4.0 m
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Row spacing of up to 12 m between panel rows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Row spacing of either 12.75 m or 13 m between panel rows
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single-axis tracking system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single-axis tracking system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Onsite substation and battery area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Onsite substation and battery area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inverters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inverters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site office, associated maintenance buildings and parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Site office, associated maintenance buildings and parking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access tracks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access tracks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20 m wide Vegetation screens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 20 m wide Vegetation screens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 m wide Firebreaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 m wide Firebreaks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2.5 m high perimeter Fencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2.5 m high perimeter Fencing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Temporary construction compound and laydown area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Temporary construction compound and laydown area

The overall reduction in the number of solar panels is brought about by the refinement of the design of the Proposal.

4.1 Site layout

This section will review the general site area and configuration of key components as relevant to matters that may bring about a change in views or visual impact between the development proposed under Planning Permit Application P2390/2018 and the new revised Proposal.

A comparison of the development layout of the Previous Application (considered by the Tribunal) and the new Proposal are shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2.

Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

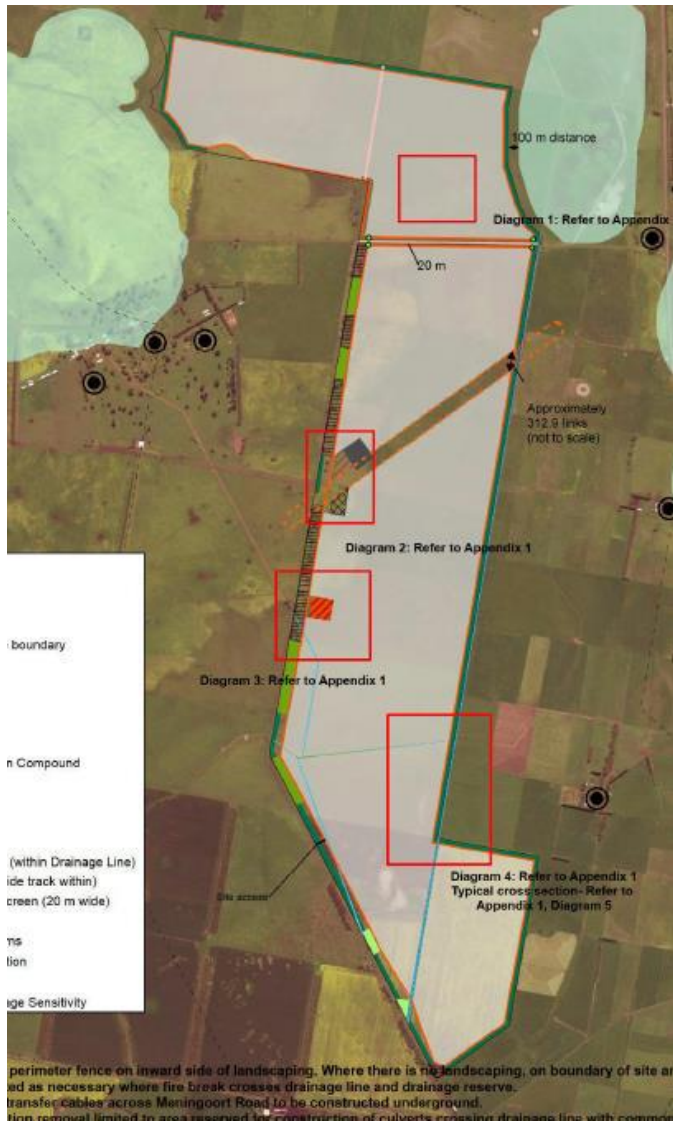


Figure 4-1 Previous Application Layout

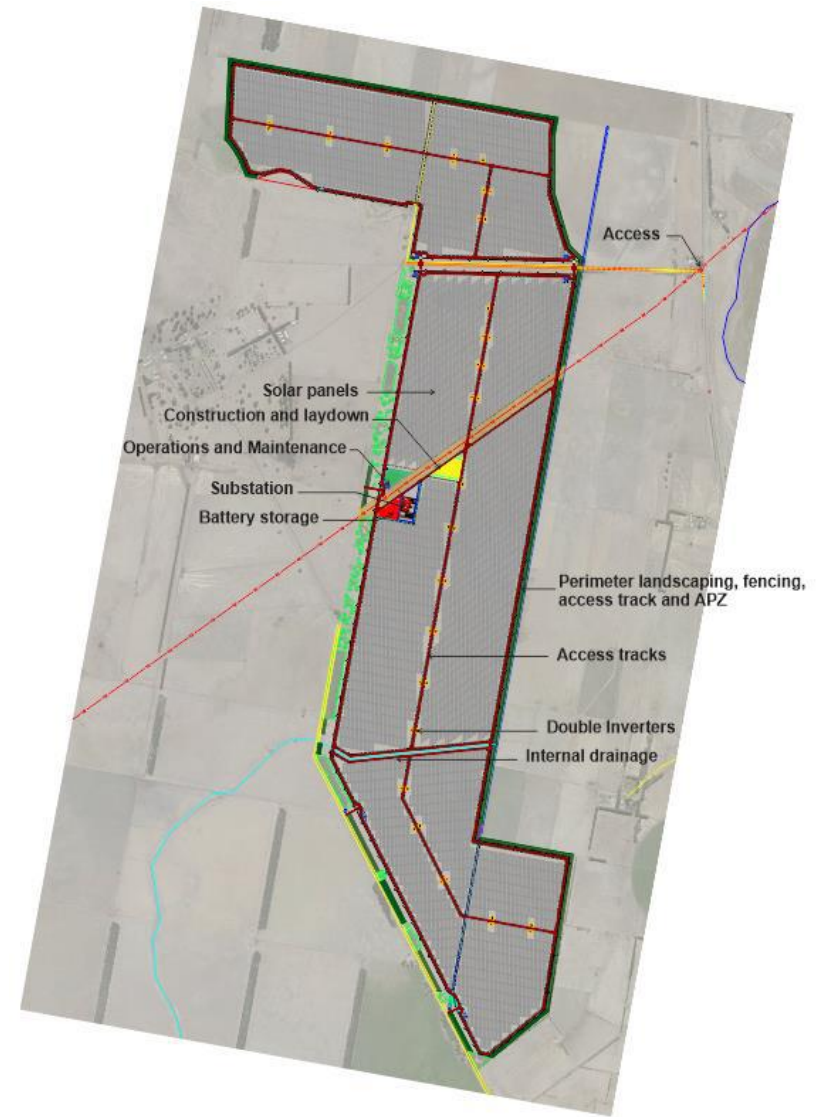


Figure 4-2 New Proposal Layout

When considered side by side, it is apparent that the site area occupied, and general layout proposed by both designs (the Previous Application and the new Proposal) has not altered. This is despite the overall reduction in the number of solar panels under the new Proposal. In response to the Tribunal's findings, the layout of the new Proposal provides more detail for features such as the location of internal access tracks, firebreaks and panel rows within the area designated as "array areas", than the Previous Application. It is apparent however that the extent of the array areas and the site boundaries are consistent between the two layouts. This is relevant for the consideration of landscape and visual impacts as the area designated for panels, which is the largest component of the Proposal, has not increased and, therefore the distance to public and private viewpoints will not alter from those considered in the assessment of the Previous Application.

It is noted that the location of the substation, battery and operations buildings are consistent with the location shown in the Previous Application, however, the layout of this area has been reconfigured by this new Proposal. The infrastructure remains in a cluster on the western boundary of the Site adjacent to the existing high voltage lines within broadly the same footprint (see Figures 4-1 and 4-2). The Substation and Battery Area have been moved to be south of the existing high voltage lines, while the Operations Buildings have been moved to the north of the existing high voltage lines. The change to this area was made in response to findings of the Flood Impact Assessment which required this area to be reconfigured to avoid inundation during a 1 in 100 year flood (see the 'Flood Impact Assessment' the supports the Planning Application for the Proposal).

The area shaded in yellow in the new Proposal shows the location of the temporary construction and laydown area. This area has been moved from the original proposed location to align better with new access locations (see Section 3.6 below), however, this area remains central to the Site, is temporary, and is located away from sensitive viewpoints.

4.2 Proposed Panels

Both layouts propose individual solar panels measuring approximately 2.0m x 1.0m, fitted to a single-axis tracking system with a maximum height of 4.0 m above ground level when at full tilt. The panels will be dark to navy blue in colour and mounted behind toughened glass with an anti-reflective coating. An elevation of the proposed solar panel and tracking system is shown below in Figure 4-3.

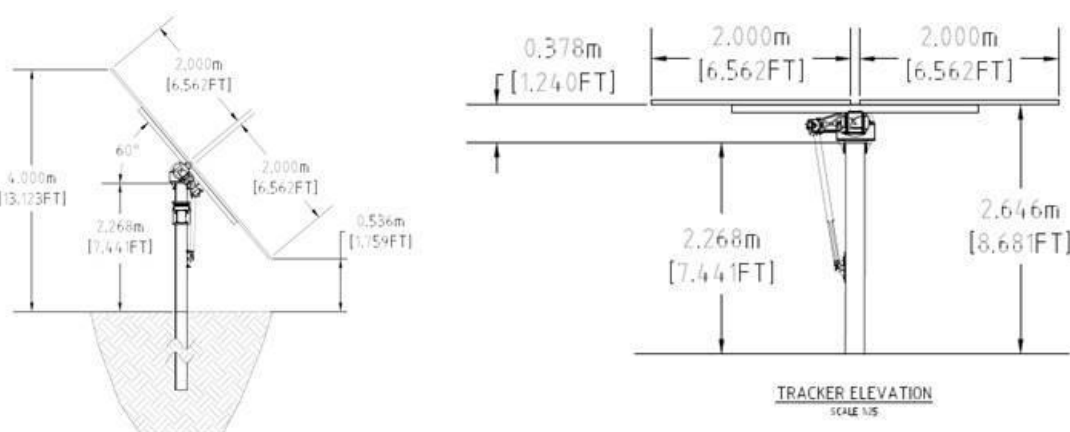


Figure 4-3 Tracking System Elevation. Not to scale. Source: NG Electrical Plans (Dated 5.06.2020)

The proposed panel configuration for both layouts is orientated north to south, allowing tracking of the sun from the east in the morning through to the west in the afternoon. This is consistent with the photomontages presented as part of the EWS and considered by the Panel in their summary report.

Figure 4-4 shows the panel layout and orientation of the new Proposal (left) compared to the panel layout and orientation of the Previous Application.

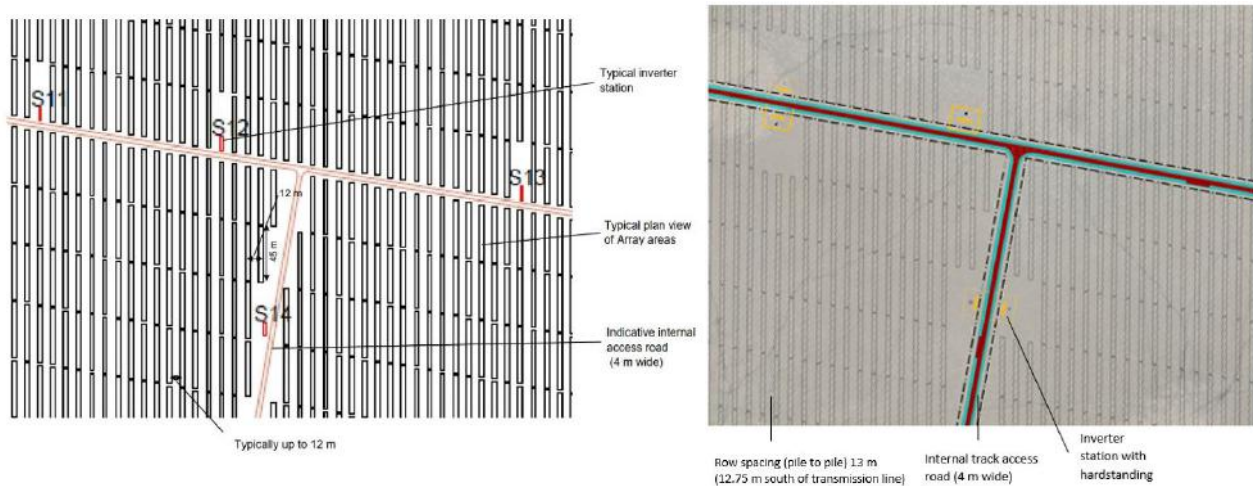


Figure 4-4 Panel orientation of the Previous Application (left) and the new Proposal (right) (*Proposal Insert Source: 'Site Plan', prepared by NG Electrical Pty Ltd; Previous Application Insert Source: 'Amended Plans Diagram 1', prepared by Ecological Australia 09 May 2019; not to scale.*)

The Previous Application considered spacing up to 12 m between panel rows. The layout for the new Proposal increases the space between panel rows to approximately 12.75 m or 13 m. The refinement of the design for the new Proposal has resulted in an overall reduction in the individual number of panels, from approximately 700,000 to 641,000.

From a visual impact perspective, the layout of the Proposal is consistent with the Previous Application. The alteration to array spacing from 12 m to 12.75 m - 13 m will not lead to a discernible change in the appearance of the solar array. A detailed assessment of representative views and theoretical project visibility is discussed in Section 6.

4.3 Inverters

Inverters are a key component of all solar farm projects. Both the Previous Application and the Proposal considered the inclusion of containerised inverters, similar in size to a shipping container located amongst the proposed panel areas. Figure 4-5 shows indicative containerised inverters ('Inverter Stations', housing two inverters), as proposed by both the Previous Application layout and the Proposal Application.



Figure 4-5 shows a proposed inverter station housing two inverters (source: SMA).

The dimensions of the inverter stations are similar for both Proposals, noting that the height has increased from approximately 2.9 m as considered by the Previous Application to 3.0 m in this new Proposal. Also, in response to detailed flood modelling, inverter stations numbered 1-2, 5-6, 9, 14, 16 and 21-37 (see the 'Site Plan' accompanying the main Planning Report), will be situated on a piles to a maximum height of 800mm above ground level. The EWS prepared for the Previous Application considered a raised hardstand of approximately 300 – 500mm as a typical platform required to create a level and suitable hardstand. This hardstand was included in the photomontages prepared for the project. These changes will increase the inverter height from approximately 3.2m – 3.5m above ground level to approximately 3.8m for the above locations. Given the central location of inverter stations within the Site (see Figure 4-4), in the context of the maximum array height of 4m, the change in height will not result in noticeable differences from any of the assessed viewpoints (detailed in Section 6).

4.4 Substation, battery storage and operations buildings

Similar to Inverters, the on-site substation, battery storage and operations buildings are key components required to operate a commercial-scale solar farm.

The layout for the new Proposal changes the configuration of the operations buildings proposed to the north of the high voltage transmission line and the substation and battery storage facility to the south, the opposite of that proposed in the Previous Application. The layout of these areas in the new Proposal is also further refined to include details of the components of the substation, battery area and operations buildings (see Figure 4-6 and 4-7). An elevation of the proposed substation and switchyard is provided in Figure 4-8.

Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

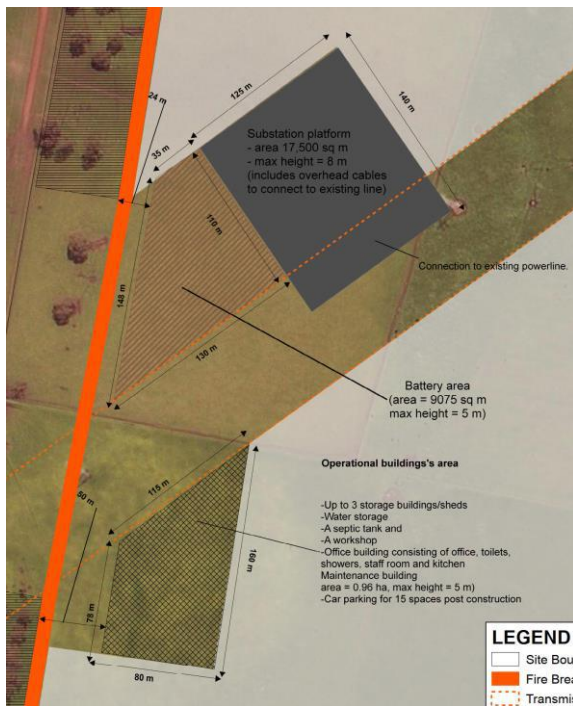


Figure 4-6 Previous Application substation, battery storage and operations buildings

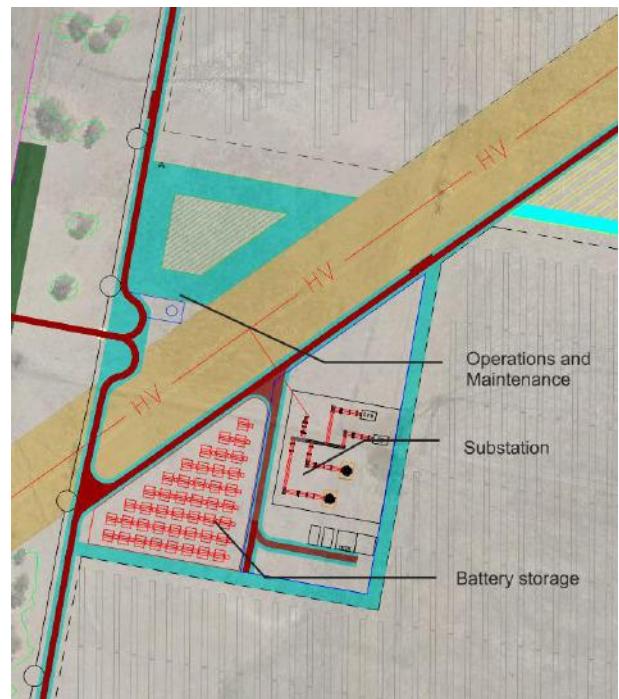


Figure 4-7 New Proposal: substation, battery storage, operational buildings. Source NG Electrical (Plans dated 29.05.2020) Modified to show ancillary area (Jacobs)

In the plan view, it is apparent that the layout of the ancillary area is more compact in this new Proposal than the same area included within the Previous Application. The northern boundary of the ancillary area shown in the new Proposal has been shifted further southwards, which is brought about by the mirroring of uses in this area. This change in layout would be noticeable if the two layouts were reviewed together (one above the other) from locations where the substation area is visible. However, the photomontages prepared for the previous application, and the amended photomontage for this New Proposal show that the substation area, when viewed from locations outside the Site where it is visible, is not a discernible feature. This is due largely to the context of the substation area in available views which include distance, scale of other infrastructure such as the existing overhead power lines. This aspect is re-examined in Section 6 of this report.

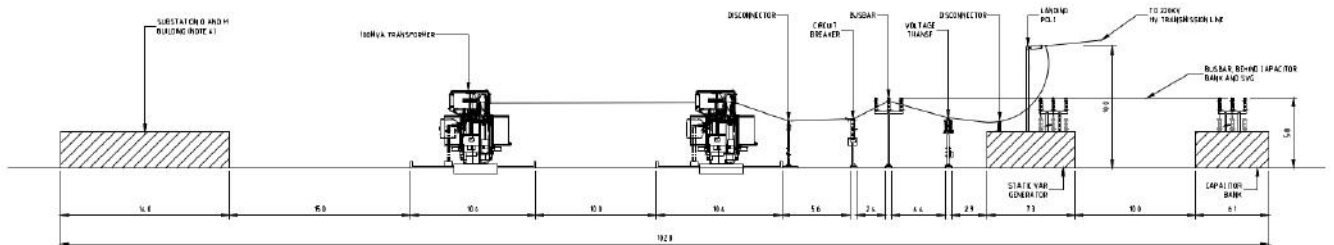


Figure 4-8 New Proposal: Substation switchyard elevation

The substation will accommodate:

- Two 220 kV transformers;
- High voltage (HV) circuit breakers, switchgear, capacitor bank and static var generator;
- Metering equipment;
- Control room;
- 33kV Switchroom;
- Substation operations and maintenance building;
- Two overhead cables connecting the substation to the existing 220 kV line;
- Parking space for service vehicles;
- A battery area will be situated adjacent to the substation, approximately 1ha and approximately 3m high.

The proposed layout and configuration of the substation shown in the layout for the new Proposal is similar in size and scale to that which was included and assessed for the Previous Application, occupying the same land area (1.76ha).

The location of the battery area remains adjacent to the substation in the new Proposal design, and also occupies the same land area (0.91 ha). It consists of a series of containerised batteries and transformers approximately 3m high, which is within the vertical dimensions proposed for the Previous Application (which was up to 5m).

The operations buildings are now proposed to the north of the transmission easement, rather than to the south of the transmission easement. These buildings will be located behind proposed landscape screening. With regard to visual impact, the location, layout and design of the operational buildings are generally consistent with the Previous Application as assessed. The operations buildings, along with the substation area buildings will be clad in standard materials such as corrugated iron, and will be finished in matte green in order to blend into the local environment as far as possible².

The proposed changes to the layout and configuration of the substation, operations buildings and battery storage area would not result in a material change in the views or the visual impact of the project considered by the Tribunal for the Previous Application. This observation is supported by the comparative photomontages prepared for the Previous Application and the amended photomontage prepared for this New Proposal and is confirmed in the re-examination of views set out in Section 6 of this report.

4.5 Access Tracks

Internal access tracks are required for the construction, operation and maintenance of the solar farm. The internal access tracks are to be constructed of compacted gravel which are 4.0 m wide with sections of localized widening to allow for the passing of vehicles in accordance with CFA Guidelines (see Bookaar Solar Farm Bushfire Risk Assessment and Mitigation Plan, which supports the Town Planning Report and Application). Small culverts will be constructed over identified drainage lines where required. All proposed access tracks will be constructed internal to the site boundaries and situated behind a perimeter landscape buffer.

The requirement for internal access tracks was considered as part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the Previous Application. It was concluded that the tracks, where visible, would be similar to the many access roads and internal farm tracks found at the Site and elsewhere in the landscape surrounding the Proposal.

Consistent with the Previous Application, the proposed access tracks included within this new Proposal are also to be located inside the Site boundary and perimeter landscaping, which will screen them from views.

4.6 Site Access

Site access for the Previous Application was via Meningoort Road from the western boundary of the Site. The Site access for the new Proposal has been redesigned to access the Site from the west using the section of

² Note that in the photomontages these elements have been shown in beige to assist with contrast and allow comparison between the Previous Application and the new Proposal.

Meningoort Road that crosses the Site. There are four entry points along Meningoort Road that allow access to all areas of the solar farm (Figure 4-9).

These entry points on Meningoort Road would remain gated as per the Previous Application, however, it is now proposed to upgrade the intersection of Meningoort Road and Darlington–Camperdown Road, and the stretch of Meningoort Road from the intersection to the western boundary of the Site (from 4 m to 7 m, including sealing the first 30 m section). These changes would require the removal or trimming of several small trees (see the 'Biodiversity Assessment' that accompanies the 'Planning Report').

Despite the limited vegetation removal and localized road improvements, the change in views and visual impact assessed for the Previous Application would be minimal for the new Proposal.

4.7 Security Fencing

Security fencing is required to be constructed around the perimeter of the Proposal, with an additional security fence around the Substation. The Previous Application specified a 2.5 m high chain wire fence would be installed around the majority of the perimeter of the solar farm. This fence was proposed to be located 20 m inside the site boundary to allow for landscape screening to be located external to the project. This was to allow filtering and screening of views to both the solar panels and the fence.

Consistent with the Previous Application, the new Proposal Layout also proposes fencing 20 m inside the Site boundary at all externally facing boundaries, to allow for a 20 m wide landscape buffer along most of the Proposal's boundary (see. Figure 4-9).

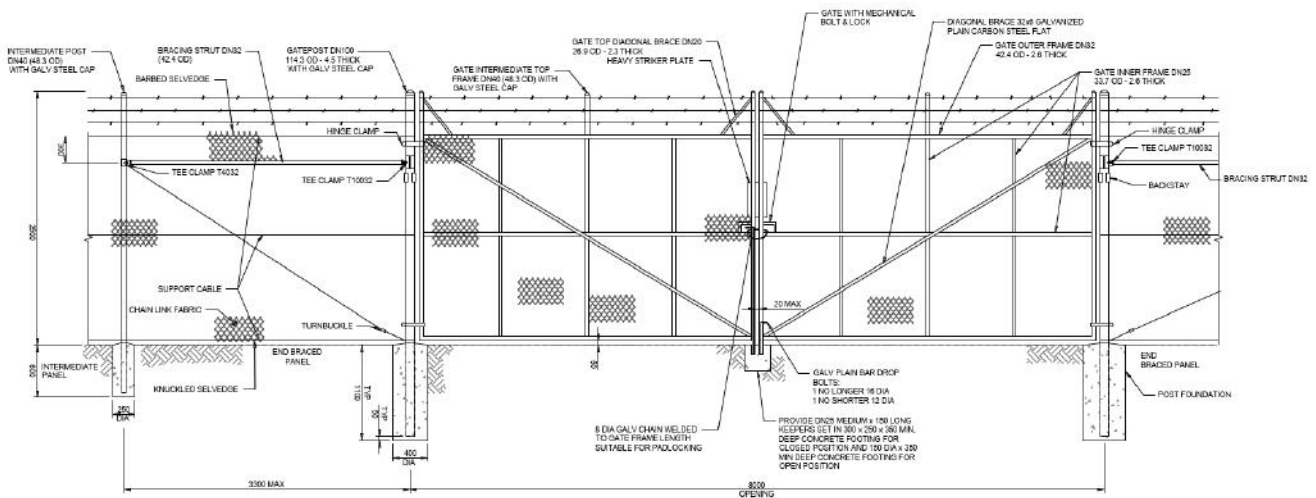


Figure 4-9 Current Proposal: Security fencing and gate elevation. Source: NG Electrical (plans dated 05.06.2020)

There are no changes to the perimeter fencing that would bring about a change in views or visual amenity considered in the EWS and the Tribunal. This is demonstrated in the visual assessment of publicly accessible viewpoints in section 6 of this report.

4.8 Landscape Screen

The Previous Application proposed a 20.0 m wide perimeter landscape screen to be located outside the security fencing. The landscape screen was proposed to be installed along the entirety of the northern boundary, the eastern boundary (except for the area where the overhead transmission line and 11 kV distribution line enters the site), and along the southern boundary. Infill planting was proposed to be installed along the western boundary between the extensive shelterbelts along this edge. Where the 11 kV line crosses the landscape screening, there will be a 6 m wide gap in the proposed screen. Trees planted within 5 m from the edge of the line will be selected and maintained to not exceed 4 m in height, and trees within 5–8m of the line will be selected and maintained to not grow higher than 9 m high, in accordance with Powercor guidance.

Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

This landscape screen proposed a minimum of four rows of native plants within a 20.0 m wide landscape buffer around the Site's perimeter. As noted in section 3.4, this proposal was considered to be acceptable by the Tribunal.

The New Proposal retains the 20.0 m wide landscape buffer comprising 4 rows of native trees. A recommendation of the bushfire assessment is the requirement to remove branches from the established screen from within two metres of the ground, to limit a fire's ability to move vertically from the ground to the canopy. This requirement, in addition to the requirement to maintain the grass below 100mm during the Fire Danger Period, will reduce the ability for fires to establish, develop significantly and enter the canopy. A revised photomontage has been prepared to show the layout and configuration of the new Proposal. The amended photomontages include a second photomontage which shows the proposed landscape screening of 4 rows of trees within a 20 m wide landscape buffer and branches crown lifted to 2.0 m above ground. These are included in Section 6 of this report at Viewpoint 7 and in Appendix B. The requirement for crown lifting does not affect the performance of the landscape screening due in part to the layering of four rows of trees planted diagonally, and due to the setback distance of publicly accessible viewpoints and neighbouring residential dwellings.

Figure 4-10 shows the draft landscape plan layout geometry, which shows the tree spacing layout of the 20 m wide landscape buffer.

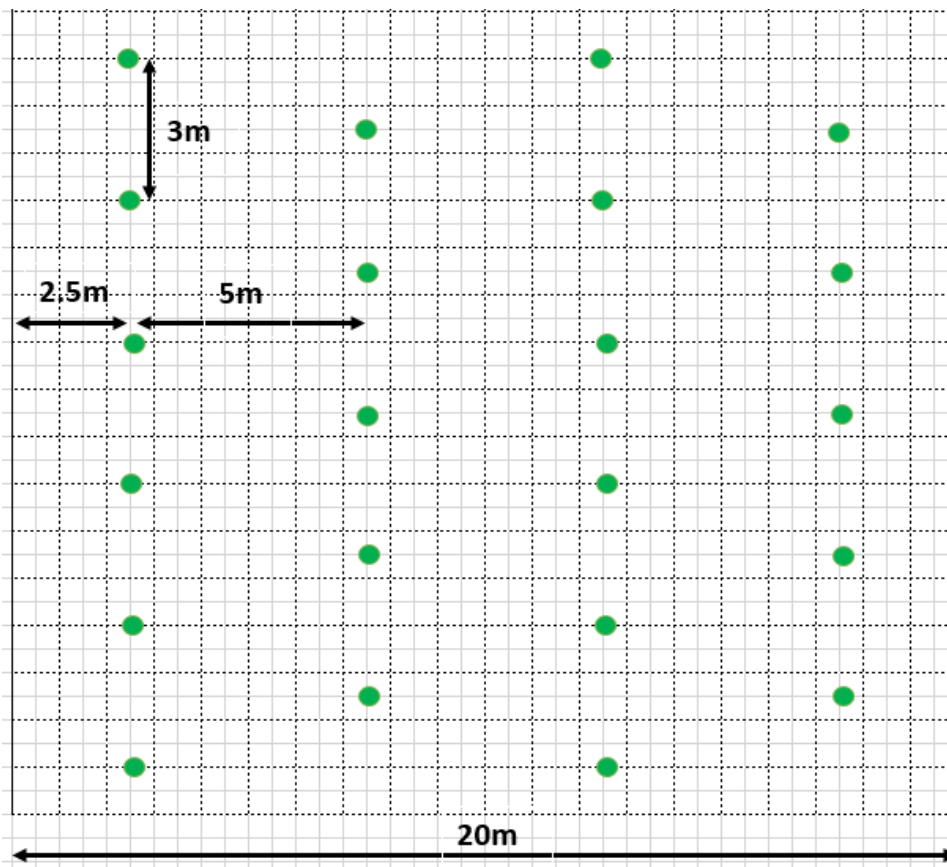


Figure 4-10 Draft Landscape Plan: Layout Geometry (Source: Draft Landscaping Plan, figure 1, prepared by Oz Trees)

Figure 4-11 shows an indicative cross section along the Site's eastern boundary, which shows the 20 m wide landscape buffer, proposed areas of tree planting, internal security fence, perimeter access track and the proposed solar panels.

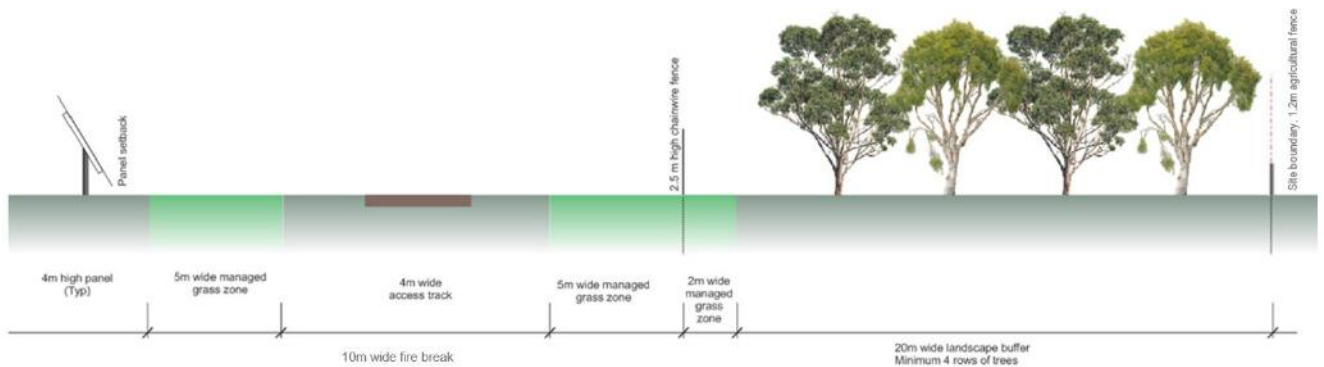


Figure 4-11 Previous Application: Proposed Landscaping Section Detail (Source: Amended Plans Diagram 5 prepared by Ecological Australia 09 May 2019)

The landscape screen included within the new Proposal is entirely consistent with the Previous Application. The location of the proposed screening within the new Proposal is to comprise 4 rows of native plants within a 20 m wide landscape buffer situated between the Site's boundary and the 2.5 m high perimeter fence. The landscape screen would be enclosed within a 1.2m high agricultural-style fence, consistent with those found in the surrounding area. This edge condition is consistent with the project upon which the Tribunal based its opinions and findings for the Previous Application.

The only change to the proposed perimeter landscape screening is along the western boundary, where the Bushfire Assessment process resulted in the recommendation of a 5.0 m wide separation between any new plantings adjacent to the existing established planting coupes along this edge. As this edge is within the host property along a section of Meningoort Road that leads into the main homestead, this requirement will not bring about a change in the visual impacts assessed for the Previous Application.

Further details on the screen layout can be found in the Draft Landscape Plan (Appendix C), and its extent is shown on the Site Plan (See Appendix A).

Consistent with the Previous Application, this screen would supplement existing screening provided by vegetation currently around the site perimeter.

4.9 Summary of the proposed changes

When the Previous Application and the new Proposal are compared, it is clear that the changes made to the new Proposal are minor and do not change the overall layout, location, extent or scale of the key project components or development footprint. Not only is the Proposal fundamentally similar, but the setback distances to sensitive viewpoints identified during the VCAT Hearing also are not altered. This is confirmed in Section 6 of this report where key views included in the EWS are re-examined in the context of this new Proposal.

Before re-examining the views included within the EWS of the Previous Application, it is worthwhile reviewing any changes that may have been made to the local planning policy that are relevant to the consideration of views, visual impact or amenity. Specifically, this will focus on the alteration or amendment of those sections of the planning scheme that identify landscape features, views, character and amenity such as Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO's), Environmental Significance Overlays (ESO's) and Heritage Overlays (HO's).

5. Planning and Policy: Review of Changes

The following section will address any new or amended planning instruments relevant to landscape and visual impact assessment since the EWS, which is appended to this report, was completed.

5.1 Zones

The subject site is located within a Farming Zone (FZ). A Road Zone (RDZ1) and PCRZ are located to the east of the site. Figure 5-1 shows the zoning of the Site and surrounding area.

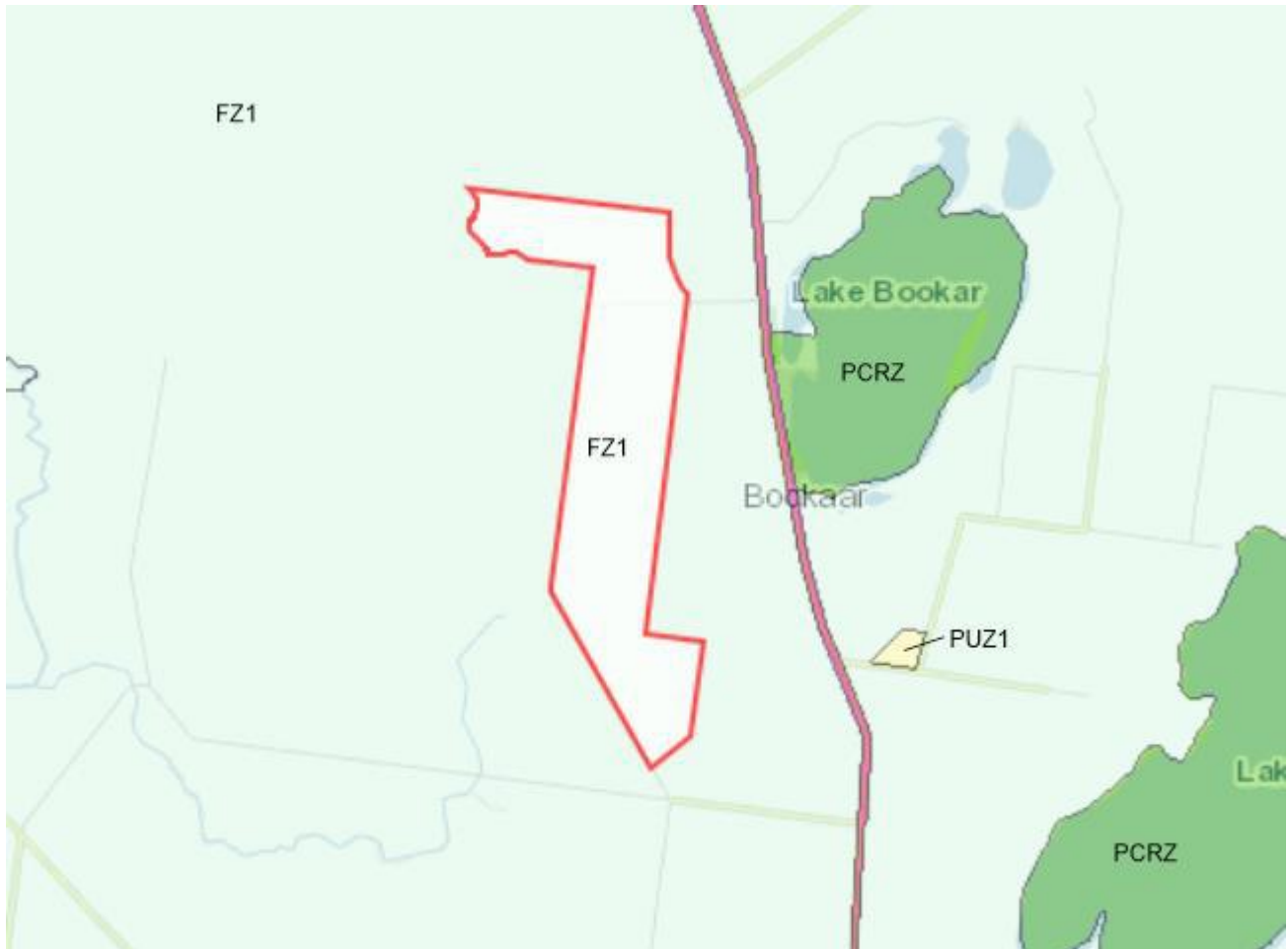


Figure 5-1 Zoning Map

The zoning of the subject site and the surrounding area has not changed since the assessment of the Previous Application.

Overlays

Overlays identify features that are significant or unique, describe their uniqueness and to provide guidance to protect these features. The Site is not subject to any Overlays. However, several overlays apply to land in close proximity to the Site, namely: Significant Landscape Overlay Schedule 1 (SLO1); Heritage Overlay Schedule 8 (HO8); and Environmental Significance Overlay Schedule 1 (ESO1). These overlays are relevant to visual impact, landscape character and heritage values and were also considered and assessed in the EWS for the Previous Application. The overlays and their proximity to the Site are shown in Figure 5-2.

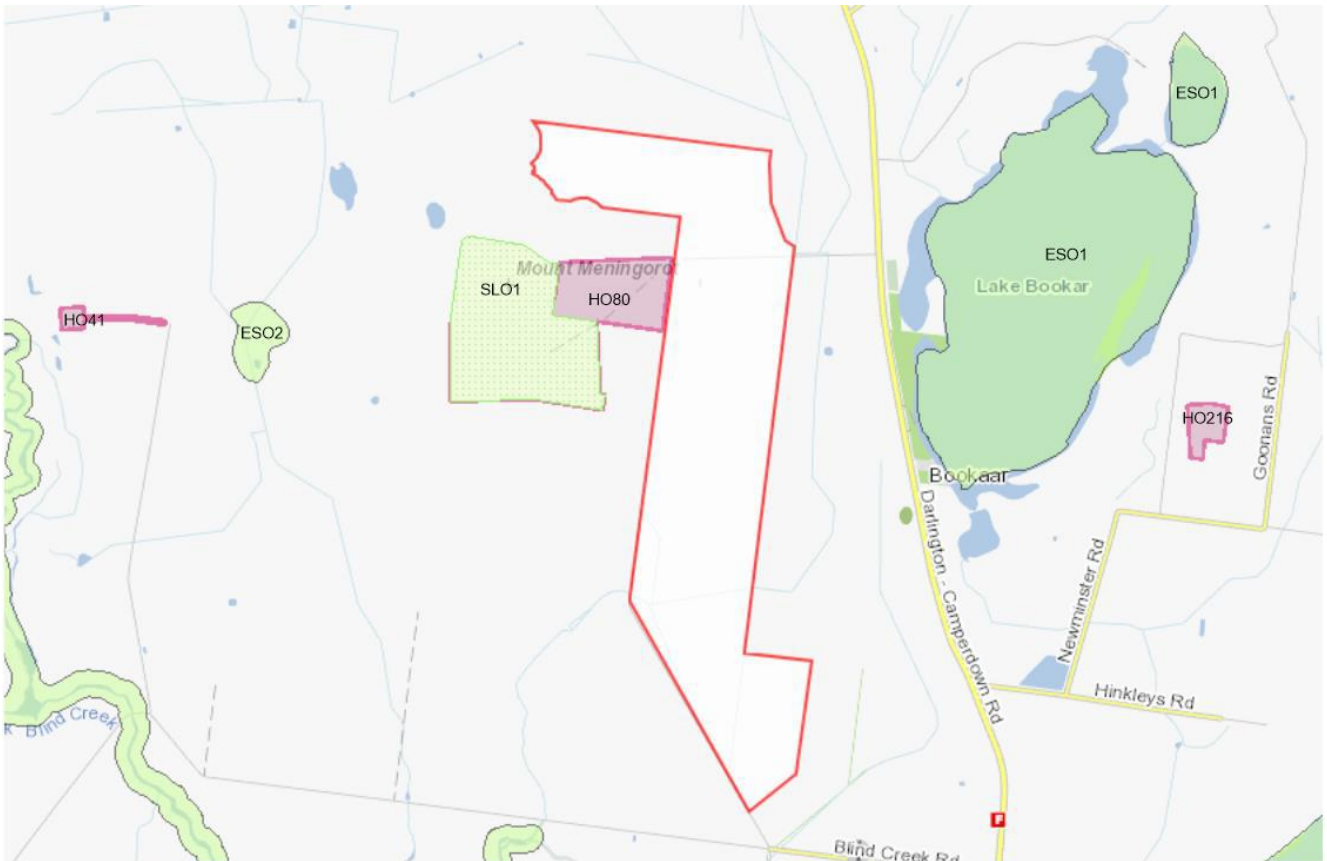


Figure 5-2 Overlays Map Source: VicPlan

Two overlays reside within the wider boundary of the host property being Significant Landscape Overlay – Schedule 1 (SLO1) and Heritage Overlay (HO80). Both overlays are outside the site boundary and are not affected by the Proposal.

Lake Bookaar, approximately 1.1 km to the east of the Site is within an area covered by Environmental Sensitive Overlay (ESO1).

The overlays within the area surrounding the Proposal have not changed since the Previous Application was assessed. There are also no new overlays included in the planning scheme.

5.2 Solar Energy Facilities – Design and Development Guideline (August 2019)

The *Solar energy facilities – design and development guideline* August 2019 (the 'Guideline') was adopted in August 2019 and is now an incorporated document within the Corangamite Planning Scheme. It provides an overview of the policy, legislative and statutory planning arrangements for a Solar Energy Facility (SEF) in Victoria and guidance on best practice for site selection, design and mitigation of impacts for SEFs.

As outlined earlier in this report, the Draft Guidelines were available at the time of the VCAT hearing for the Previous Application and were acknowledged by the Tribunal. The Tribunal noted that the Draft Guidelines refer to strategic site considerations including the selection of 'ideal' sites'. The Tribunal also notes that:

.....'there is not a need or mandatory requirement for every site to be determined to fit 'ideal' criteria rather, A site's strategic and specific circumstances must be assessed, with opportunities, constraints and impacts being identified.' (Para. 67).

The Tribunal also notes

.....'the {planning} scheme provisions and policies set out the matters we must consider. The types of considerations in the draft Solar Guidelines align with these.' (Para. 68).

The key considerations of the Draft Guidelines relevant to site selection, landscape character and views were considered and assessed as part of the EWS. For completeness, the sections of the now adopted Guideline relevant to site selection and impacts to views and landscape character are set-out below.

Identifying suitable locations

With respect to identifying suitable locations for SEF the Guideline states:

'Most well-sited, carefully designed solar energy facilities have minimal impacts on surrounding communities, the environment and other land use activities. However, a proposal to construct a solar energy facility can lead to community concern about the facility's potential impacts'.

To assist with minimising community concerns as far as is practicable, the Guideline outlines several criteria to be considered when identifying sites that are suitable to host SEF. Those that are relevant to potential Landscape and Visual Impacts and Heritage values include consideration of:

- *'the loss of vegetation, habitat or species of environmental importance*
- *the loss of cultural heritage or landscape values of significance'.*

In achieving this, the following guidance is provided for the selection of sites for SEF. Those relevant to this assessment are as follows:

- *'on land with topographical conditions that avoids the need for unnecessary or excessive earthworks or changes to the natural landscape*
- *to avoid the loss of native vegetation and biodiversity and if losses cannot be avoided, they are minimised and can be offset*
- *close to the electricity grid network, to minimise the need for additional infrastructure and associated impacts*
- *a sufficient distance from existing urban areas or designated urban growth areas*
- *where there can be adequate space between facilities within an area to avoid cumulative impacts of built form concentration*
- *where it has ready access to main roads'.*

These objectives were tested during the Tribunal Hearing and were considered in the EWS (Appendix D). At page 17, the Guideline specifically addresses the need to minimise impacts on places with high landscape values and areas with significant visual amenity. As such, SEF is not encouraged within national parks or other landscapes that are subject to the *National Parks Act, 1975*, Ramsar Wetlands, and other locations that are identified in Clause 12 Environmental and landscape Values within the VPP.

Further, the Guideline sets out specific considerations for managing views and visual impact:

- *'the sensitivity of the landscape and its ability to absorb change*
- *the size, height, scale, spacing, colour and surface reflectivity of the facility's components*
- *the number of solar energy facilities located close to each other another within the same landscape*
- *the excessive removal, or planting of inappropriate species of vegetation*
- *the location and scale of other ancillary uses, buildings and works including transmission lines, battery storage units and associated access roads*
- *the proximity to environmentally sensitive areas such as public land, water courses and low-lying areas'.*

The Guideline states that a solar farm development should be considered within its landscape context and regarding any relevant planning policy and strategy documents, such as regional growth plans, regional landscape assessment studies and relevant overlays.

5.3 Planning controls and policy conclusion

The EWS reviewed sections of the planning scheme that give rise to consideration of matters relating to landscape and visual impact of a proposed solar farm in the Corangamite Shire. This review considered the implications of the relevant overlays within the Corangamite Planning Scheme, specifically Significant Landscape Overlays, Environmental Significance Overlays and Heritage Overlays, as well as the SWLVAS. The SWLVAS identifies landscapes and views of local, regional or state significance, all of which underpinned concerns raised in submissions and which were considered by the Tribunal.

The Tribunal's findings were that the Previous Application would not result in an unreasonable level of visual impact in the context of views from the surrounding landscape, views identified in the SWLVAS, or landscapes recognised in overlays under the Corangamite Planning Scheme.

With the exception of the finalisation of the Guideline, there have been no changes made to key documents or strategies since the Previous Application was considered by the Tribunal.

The following section will assess the new Proposal in the context of the now adopted Guideline, and viewing locations considered by the Tribunal for the Previous Application.

6. Landscape and Visual Assessment of the New Proposal

The following section will revisit the viewpoint locations identified in the EWS to assess the potential landscape and visual impact of the new Proposal and the requirements of the Solar Energy Facilities - Design and Development Guideline (2019).

Section 3 of this report has demonstrated that the new Proposal sits entirely within the development envelope of the Previous Application and the proposed solar panels and ancillary infrastructure is also the same or generally consistent with the Previous Application.

Due to the new Proposal being largely consistent with the Previous Application and the fact that no additional viewpoints of concern were raised during the hearing or by the Tribunal, it is considered that the ten viewpoint locations included within the assessment of the Previous Application are appropriate to assess and understand the potential landscape impact of the new Proposal.

6.1 Publicly Accessible Viewpoints

The ten viewpoints included in the assessment of the Previous Application were selected to consider a range of viewing distances, locations and angles towards the Site and to gain an appreciation the of a solar facility in the context and setting of the character of the area. As mentioned above, the location of these viewpoints was not expressly challenged during the hearing, nor were there any viewing locations considered to be omitted from the EWS. The viewpoint locations were selected to provide an understanding of the nature of the visibility of the Proposal with regard to distance and the features of the surrounding landscape.

The location of the selected viewpoints in relation to the new Proposal are shown in Figure 6-1.

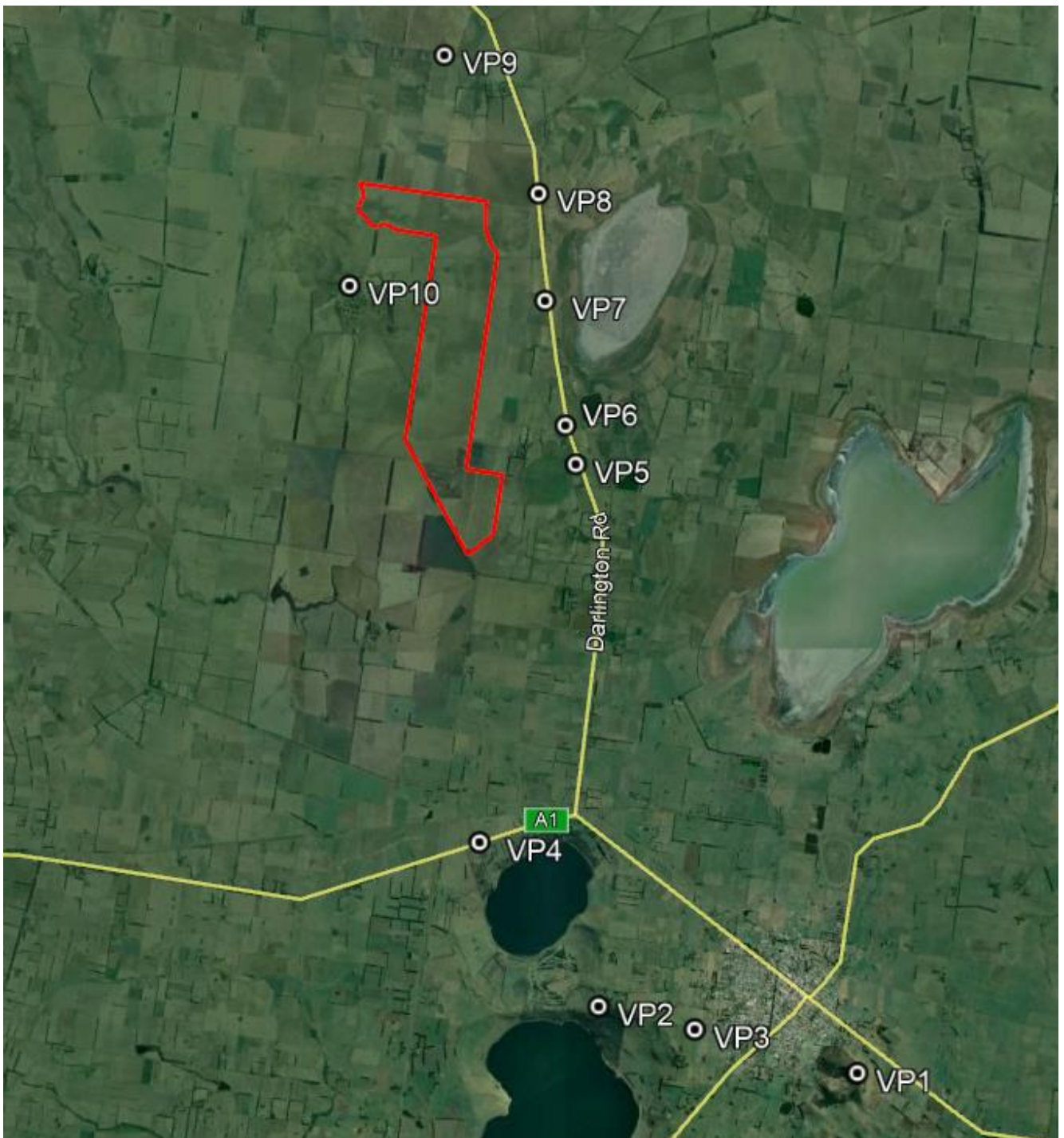


Figure 6-1 Viewpoint Locations and approximate Site boundary (base source: Google Earth)

6.2 Photomontages

The view from VP7 located on Darlington – Camperdown Road provides a clear view towards the Site and the Proposal. In addition to enabling clear views, this location also includes views towards the area of the substation, operation and maintenance buildings and battery storage facility.

A photomontage was prepared from this location as part of the EWS, which was based upon a digital model of the Previous Application. This photomontage has been updated to show the new Proposal. These

photomontages allow a direct comparison of the changes proposed by the new Proposal. A second photomontage has been included to demonstrate the proposed landscape screening of the new Proposal.

Figure 6-2 shows an enlargement of the photomontage prepared as part of the EWS for the Previous Application. Figure 6-3 below shows the enlargement of the same section of the view with the new Proposal superimposed into the view. Figure 6-4 shows the same enlargement for the New Proposal with the proposed landscape screening.



Figure 6-2 Enlargement of photomontage - Previous Application

The photomontage prepared for the Previous Application (above), includes the perimeter fencing, project panels, inverters, substation and buildings included in the area of the operations and maintenance facilities. Although visible, the substation, operations and maintenance facilities are not readily discernible features in the view. Figure 6-3 below shows the new proposal and reconfigured plant and buildings proposed by the New Proposal.

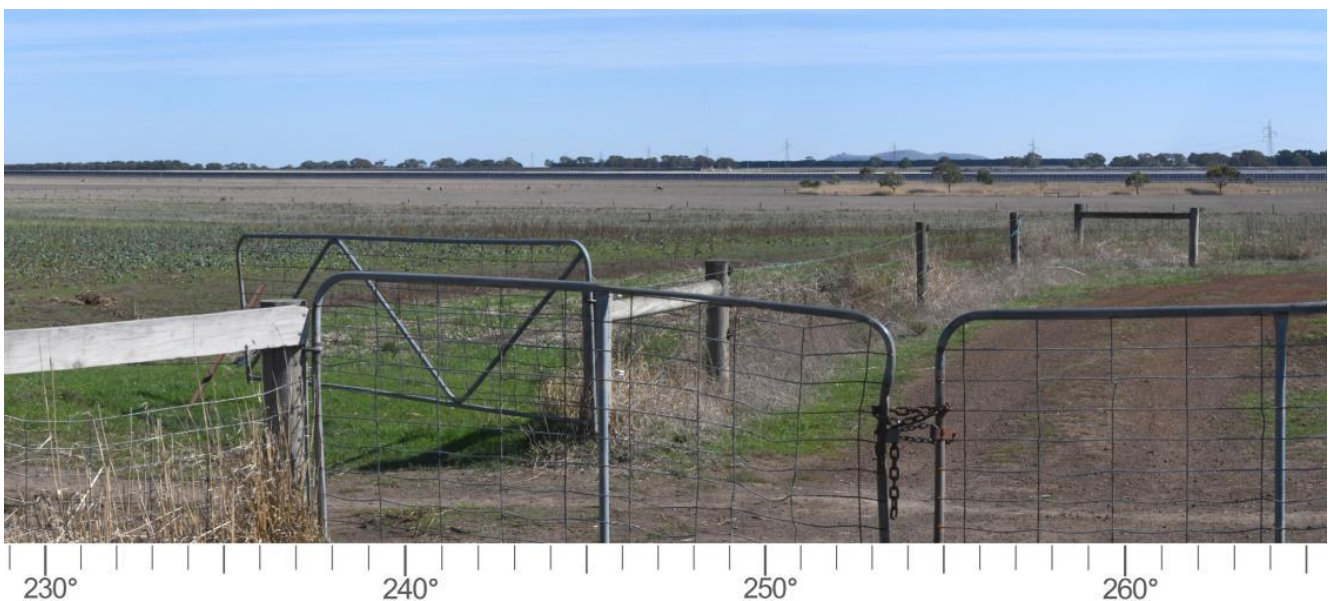


Figure 6-3 Enlargement of photomontage – Proposal

Similar to the view shown in Figure 6-2 of the Previous Application (above) the substation, operations and maintenance facilities are still visible but not readily discernible features in the view.

Figure 6-4 shows the same view with the proposed landscaping superimposed into the view.

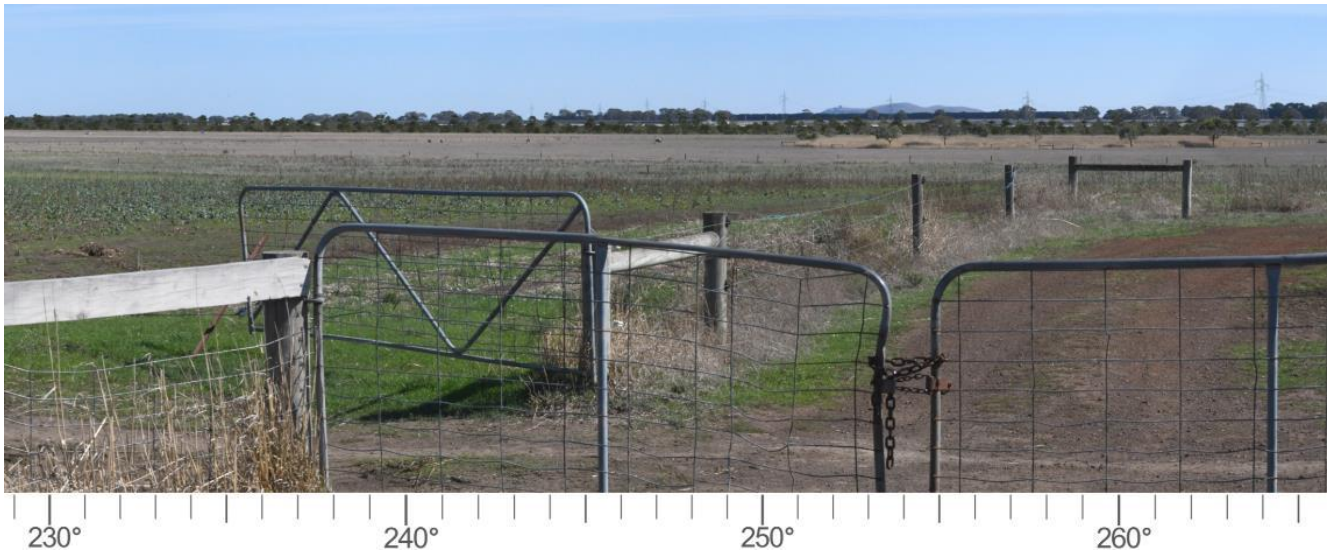


Figure 6-4 Enlargement of photomontage - Proposal with landscape screening

Further detail on the preparation of photomontages and the accompanying methodology set out in the EWS (Appendix D) describes how imagery should be used to support the interpretation and assessment of the Proposal in views from the surrounding landscape. An important point of reference in all views is the high voltage transmission towers which bisect the Site.

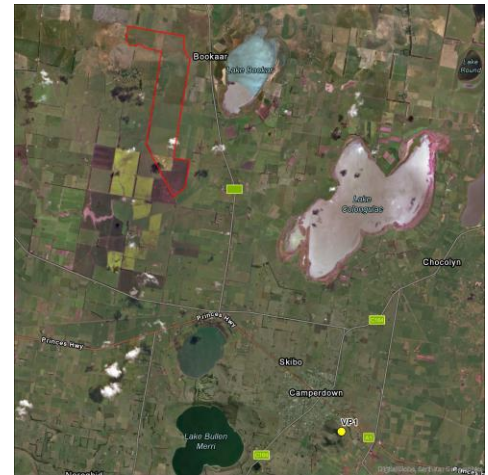
6.2.1 Viewpoint 1 – Mt Leura Lookout

Viewpoint 1 (VP1) is situated at the Lookout on the top of Mt Leura to the south-east of the Proposal site.

The nearest site boundary is approximately 10km north-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as Mt Leura was identified as a significant viewing location within the SWLA. It is also one of the few locations requested by Council to be considered by the original Visual Impact Assessment for this project.

Figure 6-5 shows the view looking north-west towards the Proposal site from the lookout.



(54H 68825 E, 5764868 S)

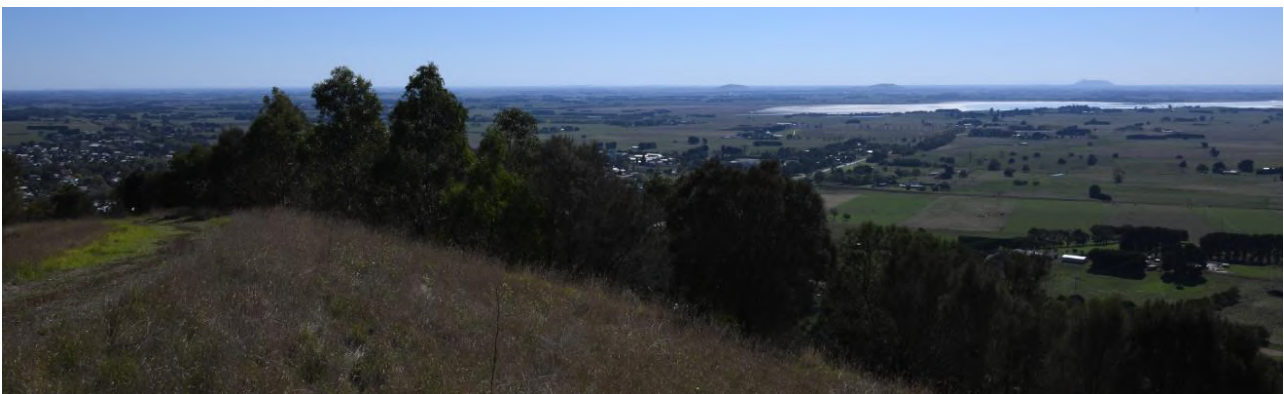


Figure 6-5: Viewpoint 1 – View looking northeast from Mt Leura Lookout

The approach to Mt Leura winds upwards from Campersdown to the north, and up the northern and eastern faces towards a carpark located to the south of the summit. There is a short walk of approximately 150-200 m from the carpark to the Mt Leura lookout located at the summit.

The Mt Leura summit provides 360° views which take in the vast volcanic plains that the district is renowned for. The elevated volcanic cones punctuate the otherwise flat horizon. The numerous lakes, of which Lake Corangamite is the largest, visually contrast against the tapestry created by the various agricultural activities and windbreaks in the region.

On a clear day, the Proposal would be visible from the lookout and parts of a walking trail located on the northern face of Mt Leura. However, the Proposal is at such a distance that visually it would appear as part of the diverse agricultural landscape which changes seasonally depending on the agricultural regime.

Although the Site for development is at a distance that would not be discernible in views at ground level, because of the elevation of Mount Leura, the Proposal would be visible from this viewpoint as a low-lying element in the distant foreground of the volcanic cone of Mt Meningoort. However, it should be noted that at this distance (10 km), it would not be possible to identify the individual components of the Proposal.

The Tribunal's finding on views from this location was as follows:

Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

'The proposed facility will not be a substantial element in this broader context and panorama. We agree with Mr Burge that it would appear as part of the diverse agricultural landscape which changes seasonally depending on the agricultural regime' (Para. 174).

The visual impact of the Proposal would therefore be negligible to low over the ordinary day to day and seasonal changes of views across the landscape.

6.2.2 Viewpoint 2 – Camperdown Botanic Gardens

Viewpoint 2 (VP2) is located in the Camperdown Botanic Gardens to the south of the Proposal site.

The nearest site boundary is approximately 7.3km north-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as views from Lake Bullen Merri and Lake Gnotuk were identified as significant viewing locations within the SWLA. Views from the Botanic Gardens are taken from elevated locations on the eastern edge of these lakes.

Figure 6-6 shows the view looking north towards the Proposal site.



(54H 684873 E, 5765968 S)



Figure 6-6: Viewpoint 2 – View looking north from carpark

Figure 6-6 shows the view from the edge of the Botanic Gardens carpark. Views are directed out to the west across Lake Bullen Merri and Lake Gnotuk which are recognised as significant landscape features in the Corangamite Planning Scheme.

The Proposal is not visible and will not compete with key views towards these features from any area within the Botanic Gardens. From the carpark views to the north towards the Proposal are screened by existing topography and vegetation.

Figure 6-7 shows the view looking north-west from the picnic area in the northern section of the Botanic Gardens.



Figure 6-7: Viewpoint 2 – View looking north-west from the picnic area (54H 685006 E, 5766121 S)

Views to the north-west towards the Proposal from the picnic ground are filtered by existing vegetation.

There may be views towards the Proposal from other locations within the Botanic Gardens and the nearby caravan park. Similar to the views from Mt Leura, the Proposal would be at such a distance that it would not be a dominant element in views. The visual impact would be negligible to low over the ordinary day to day and seasonal changes of views across the landscape.

From this location, the findings of the Tribunal for the Previous Application stated that:

'at the distances involved, we do not consider the proposal would fundamentally change one's appreciation of the landscape, views, vistas and viewing corridors' (Para. 180).

For the reasons outlined above the visual impact of the Proposal will be negligible to low over the day to day and seasonal changes of view across the landscape.

6.2.3 Viewpoint 3 – Park Lane

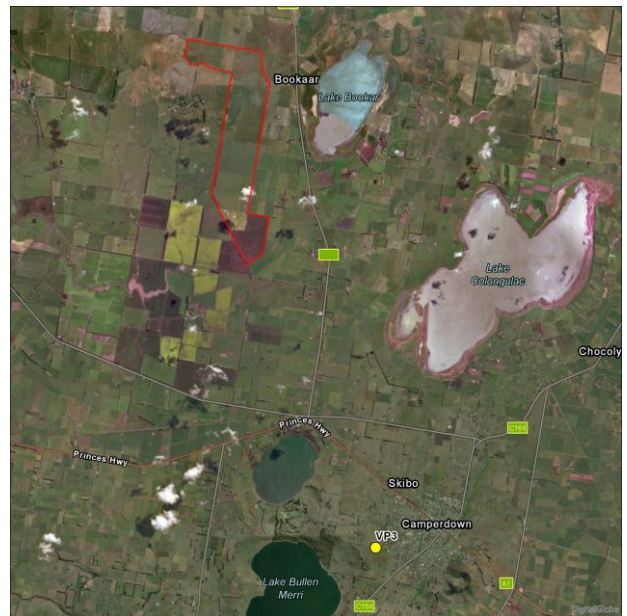
Viewpoint 3 (VP3) is located on Park Lane approximately 500m west of Bowen Street to the south of the Proposal site.

The nearest site boundary is approximately 8.1km north-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as representative of views from roads to the south-east of Camperdown that have views to the north and towards the Proposal site.

This location is at a lower elevation to the views from Mt Leura and Camperdown Botanic Gardens but more elevated than views from within the town.

Figure 6-8 shows the view looking north-west towards the Proposal site.



(54H 686347 E, 5765584 S)



Figure 6-8: Viewpoint 3 – View looking north-west from Park Lane

At this lower level, the windbreak and shelterbelt plantings that define the property boundaries across the landscape, mesh together to limit views of the clear open paddocks and landscapes at lower elevations and within the plains, even for the nearby paddocks between this viewing location and the Proposal.

At a distance of 8.1 km the solar farm may be visible but will not be a dominant element in the view. The proposed landscaping will assist to filter or screen views of the Proposal over time.

For these reasons, the visual impact is negligible.

6.2.4 Viewpoint 4 – Princes Highway

Viewpoint 4 (VP4) is located on the Princes Highway approximately 700m east of Sandys Lane to the south of the Proposal site.

The nearest site boundary is approximately 4.5km north of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as representative of views from the Princes Highway that runs to the north of Camperdown.

Figure 6-9 shows the view looking north towards the Proposal site.



(54H 683093 E, 5768524 S)



Figure 6-9: Viewpoint 4 – View looking north from Princes Highway

The existing site and the area of the Proposal is not visible due to the distance, low viewing angle and existing vegetation found in the landscape between the Princes Highway and the Site.

There will be no views and therefore no visual impact of the Proposal from this and any other locations observed along this section of the Princes Highway.

6.2.5 Viewpoint 5 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #1

Viewpoint 5 (VP5) is located on Darlington-Camperdown Road approximately 380m north of Hinkleys Road to the east of the Proposal site.

The nearest site boundary is approximately 1.2km south-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as it represents views from Darlington-Camperdown Road while heading north towards Darlington.

Figure 6-10 shows the view looking west towards the Proposal site.



(54H 684735 E, 5774369 S)



Figure 6-10: Viewpoint 5 – View looking west from Darlington-Camperdown Road

Existing vegetation will filter or screen views to the southern section of the Proposal which is approximately 1.2km to the west. A break in existing vegetation will permit views to the northern section approximately 2km away. The silhouette of Mount Meningoort can be seen in the background of this view.

The Darlington-Camperdown Road is the main road between Darlington and Camperdown. Due to distance, screening afforded by existing vegetation and the general vehicle speed of 100km/hr along this road, the visual impact prior to the establishment of landscape screening would be negligible. Over time, the proposed 20m wide landscape planting, located along the entire eastern boundary will screen all views to the Proposal, reducing the visual impact to Nil.

6.2.6 Viewpoint 6 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #2

Viewpoint 6 (VP6) located on Darlington-Camperdown Road approximately 1.0km north of Hinkleys Road to the east of the Proposal site

The nearest site boundary is approximately 1.3km south-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected for the open nature of views to the Proposal from the Darlington-Camperdown Road.

Figure 6-11 shows the view looking west towards the Proposal site.



(54H 684589 E, 5774982 S)



Figure 6-11: Viewpoint 6 – View looking west from Darlington-Camperdown Road

There are open views to the Proposal site from this location along the Darlington-Camperdown Road. However, views to the Proposal will be oblique to the direction of travel, and relatively short in duration. Further, existing vegetation between the Site and the Darlington-Camperdown Road would screen or filter views for road users.

The silhouette of Mount Meningoort which is covered by a Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO1) can be seen in the background of this view. Figure 6-12 shows an enlargement of the view focussing on the area of the Proposal and the substation.



Landscape and Visual Impact Statement

Figure 6-12: Enlargement of Viewpoint 6 – View looking west from Darlington-Camperdown Road

Even in this enlarged view, the high voltage transmission lines and existing plantings along the Site's western boundary, which are taller and more visually prominent than any component proposed as part of the Proposal, are barely visible and do not compete with views to Mount Meningoort and surrounding open paddocks.

The proposed solar panels, substation and maintenance buildings would sit low in this view, and from other locations along Darlington – Camperdown Road. Similar to the previous viewing location, due to a combination of the overall distance to the Proposal, screening afforded by existing vegetation and the speed of the road being 100km/hr, the visual impact prior to the establishment of landscape screening would be low.

Over time, the proposed 20m wide landscape planting, located along the entire eastern boundary will screen all views to the Proposal which will reduce the visual impact to Negligible-Nil.

6.2.7 Viewpoint 7 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #3

Viewpoint 7 (VP7) is located on Darlington-Camperdown Road approximately 2.7km south of E Hill Road to the east of the Proposal site

The nearest Site boundary is approximately 870m west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as it is one of the more open views towards the Proposal from Darlington-Camperdown Road. It is also the closest viewpoint, which, in combination with the open views to the Site, means that the Proposal will appear larger in the photomontage from this viewpoint than if it was represented in a photomontage from any other viewpoint.

This location also includes the cluster of operational infrastructures located midway along the western boundary through a break in the panel layout.



(54H 684317 E, 5776955 S)

Figure 6-14 shows the view looking west towards the Proposal site.



Figure 6-13: Viewpoint 7 – existing view looking west from Darlington-Camperdown Road

Figure 6-14 shows the photomontage of the same view prepared for Planning Permit Application No P2390/2018 as described as the beginning of this chapter. An A3 size version of the photomontage can be found in Appendix B.



Figure 6-14: Viewpoint 7 – Photomontage Previous Application (without proposed vegetation)



Figure 6-15 Viewpoint 7 - Photomontage New Application (Without proposed vegetation)

Section 3 of this report determined that the current Proposal is identical in setback distances from boundaries and viewpoint locations, and panel height to the Previous Application. The amended photomontage which shows the New Proposal, confirms this.

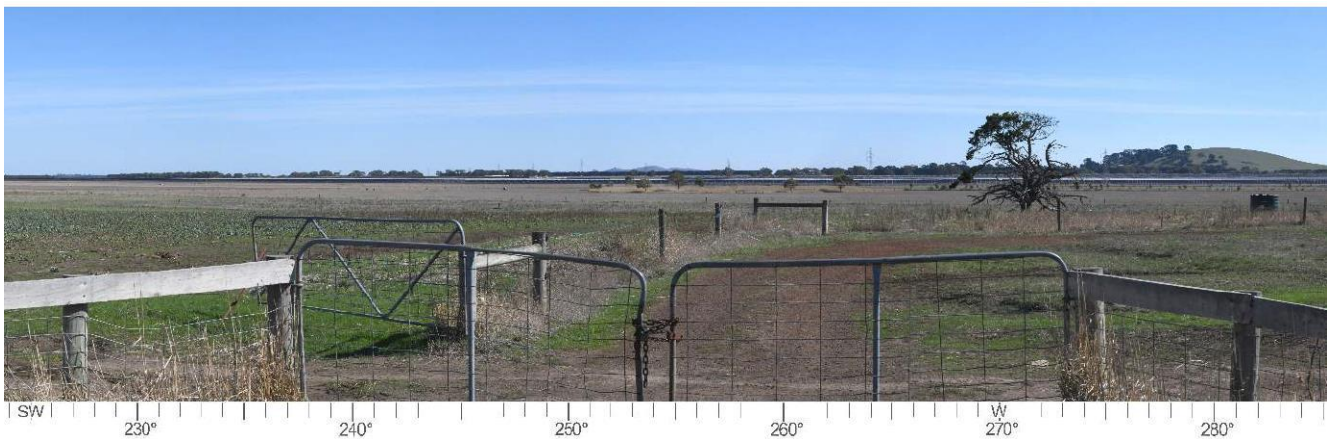


Figure 6-16 shows an enlargement of the photomontage seen in the figure above. This enlargement of the view focuses on the location of the substation and maintenance buildings situated mid-way along the Site's western boundary and beneath the existing high voltage transmission line.

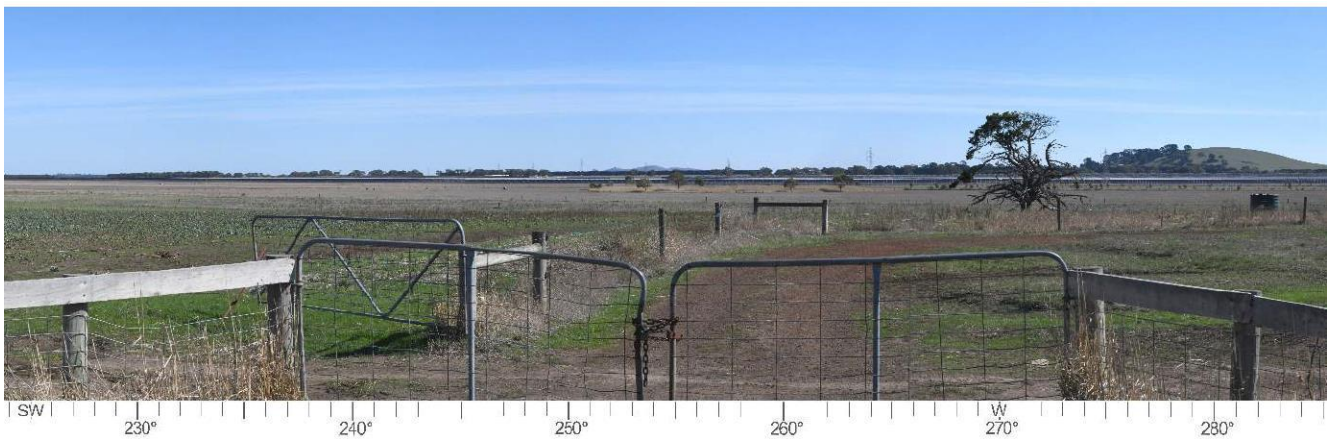


Figure 6-16: Viewpoint 7 – Photomontage enlargement (without proposed vegetation)

This enlargement of the view further demonstrates that although the Proposal may be visible, the key components of the Proposal will sit low in the landscape and will not impede on features and landscapes that are recognised by the planning scheme, or in guiding documents such as the SWLVAS.

Figure 6-17 shows the same section of the enlarged view which includes the proposed 20 m wide landscape screen.

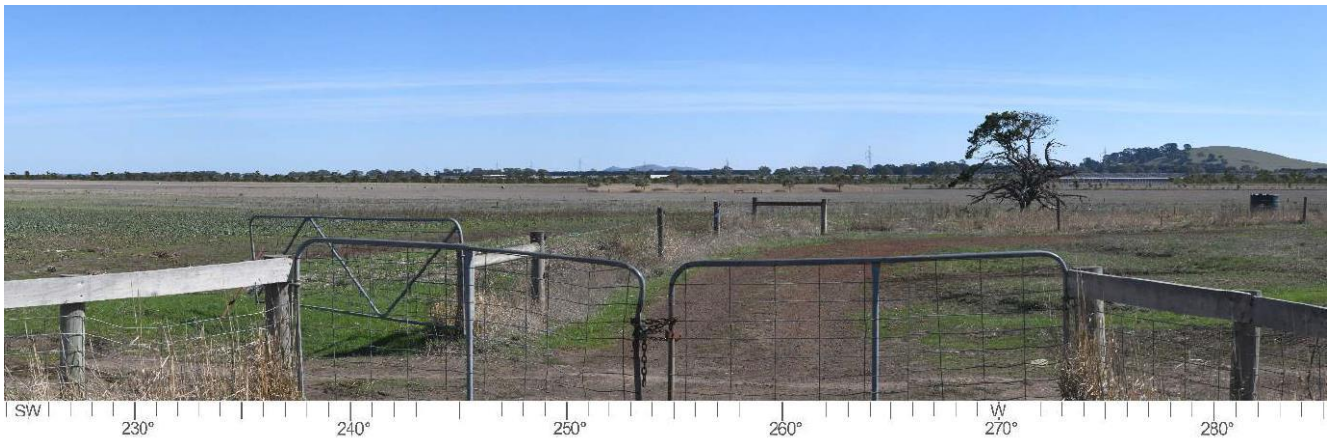


Figure 6-17 Viewpoint 7 - Photomontage New Application (With proposed vegetation)

The limited visibility of the project seen in Figure 6-15 is further reduced by the proposed 20 m landscape screen along the eastern perimeter of the Proposal.

The photomontage, even when enlarged shows that at this distance the panels would sit low in the otherwise flat landscape and would not be a visually dominant feature or element in these views. Further, the panel area and other key features of the Proposal would not impede, nor detract from views of the elevated Mount Meningoort which is recognised by Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO1) and under the SWLVAS.

While the substation, battery area and operations buildings have been redesigned, they are located within the same area shown in the above photomontages and below the existing transmission lines which cross the Site.

The proposed changes to the current Proposal layout simply rearrange the location of the sub-station, battery storage facility and operations buildings within the same footprint.

The largest of these features is the substation which would connect the Proposal to the existing overhead powerline which bisects the Site. Even before landscape screening, it is clear from the earlier imagery that its key elements will not be dominant features in views, nor will they compete with views to Mount Meningoort.

Further, this photomontage supports the conclusions made in the EWS for the Previous Application and by the Tribunal that the Proposal will sit low in the landscape and would not compete with key views, recognised landscapes or features of the area.

For these reasons, the visual impact of the Proposal is considered to be Low. Over time, the proposed 20m wide landscape planting, located along the entire eastern boundary will filter views to the Proposal which will reduce the visual impact to Negligible-Nil.

6.2.8 Viewpoint 8 – Darlington-Camperdown Road #4

Viewpoint 8 (VP8) is located on Darlington-Camperdown Road approximately 1.0km south of E Hill Road to the east of the Proposal site

The nearest site boundary is approximately 830m south-west of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as it represents a clear open view from Darlington-Camperdown Road when heading south from Darlington. This view is also the point where the project boundary is the closest to Darlington-Camperdown Road.

Figure 6-18 shows the view looking south-west towards the Proposal site.



(54H 684256 E, 5778656 S)



Figure 6-18: Viewpoint 8 – View looking south-west from Darlington-Camperdown Road

Even though there are potential open views towards the Proposal from this location along Darlington-Camperdown Road, views will be oblique and relatively short in duration.

The Proposal will sit low in the landscape and will not detract from views to the elevated hill to the west of the Meningoort Homestead.

For these reasons, the visual impact would be assessed as low to Negligible. Over time, the proposed 20m wide landscape planting, located along the northern and eastern boundaries will screen the Proposal in all views, reducing the visual impact to Nil.

6.2.9 Viewpoint 9 – Kilnoorat Road

Viewpoint 9 (VP9) is located on Kilnoorat Road approximately 930m west of Darlington-Camperdown Road to the north of the Proposal site.

The nearest Site boundary is approximately 2.2km south of this viewpoint.

This viewpoint was selected as it is representative of views from local roads to the north of the Proposal.

Figure 6-19 shows the view looking south towards the Proposal. Mount Meningoort can be seen in a break in vegetation in the middle-ground of this view. The taller, high voltage transmission line is barely discernible in views.



(54H 682820 E, 5780892 S)



Figure 6-19: Viewpoint 9 – View looking south from Kilnoorat Road

Even though there are potentially open views towards the Proposal, it is clear from the limited visibility of the taller features such as Mount Meningoort and the existing high voltage transmission lines, that the Proposal would barely be discernible from this location, and others along Kilnoorat Road.

It is also clear that the Proposal will not compete with key views, prominent vistas or landscape features that are recognised by the planning scheme or the SWVLA.

For these reasons, the visual impact would be assessed as low. Over time, the proposed 20m wide landscape planting, located along the northern boundary will screen all views to the project which will reduce the visual impact to Negligible-Nil.

6.2.10 Viewpoint 10 – Meningoort Homestead

Viewpoint 10 (VP10) is located within the grounds of Meningoort Homestead. The homestead is also owned by the host landowner of the Proposal.

This viewpoint has been included not for the purposes of views or visual impact as they are privately held views and associated with the Proposal, rather, this viewpoint explores concerns raised by objectors to the Previous Application that the Proposal would impact on the heritage significance of the homestead and the view captured in a painting by Eugene Von Guerard in 1861.

The nearest Proposal boundary is approximately 1.2km east of this viewpoint. This view is approximately 1.5 times the distance of that shown in the photomontage prepared for Darlington-Camperdown Road.



(54H 681250 E, 5777252 S)

Figure 6-20 shows the view looking south-east towards the Proposal Site from a location that is proximal to the location captured in the Eugene Von Guerard painting.



Figure 6-20: Viewpoint 10 – View over the top of the homestead

Figure 6-21 shows an enlargement of this view which focuses on the approximate scene captured by the Eugene Von Guerard Painting. The Eugene Von Guerard painting is shown in Figure 6-22 below.



Figure 6-21: Viewpoint 10 – View over the top of the homestead



Figure 6-22: Painting of the homestead – Eugene Von Guerard (Source: Scottish Migrants and the Western District article by Ben Wilkie)

The assessment of this view in the EWS concluded that the scene captured in the original painting has changed and matured over time and in several ways. This includes the expansion of the original homestead from its original proportions to include several new wings, out-buildings and verandas. The fabric of the building has been modified from corrugated iron roofing in the painting to slate tiles. The chimneys have been altered from redbrick to split face bluestone, and modern features such as skylights have been included in the western lean-to.

Further, the original landscape plantings captured in the painted scene comprise young trees and early cottage gardens. These plantings comprise the many mature and exotic trees within and around the grounds and gardens attached to the homestead. The native trees in the nearby paddocks and surrounding landscape also appear to have matured. These now mature plantings and remnant vegetation now screen views towards the elevated features including Mt Leura and the hill on which the Camperdown Botanic Gardens are located.

The feature that has remained is the existing driveway central to both views and the elevated volcanic cones in the distance. The Proposal will not impact in any meaningful way on the scene and setting captured within the Eugene Von Guerard painting as it will sit low in the landscape, it will be filtered by existing vegetation around the homestead and will not block views towards the key elevated features of Mt Leura. Further, it must also be recognised that this location is within a privately held property that is seldom open to the public.

The Tribunal's findings on the potential of the Previous Application to impact the values of the view captured by Eugene Von Guerard are set-out at paragraphs 197 - 203 of the Tribunal's report. Those that are relevant to this Proposal and re-examination of the view are summarised below:

We do not accept submissions that the proposed development will negatively impact on the Heritage Overlay or SLO1 (Mt Meningoort). We are unable to agree that the proposed development will adversely affect the integrity of the heritage place and its setting. Just because the solar facility could be seen, to varying degrees from the heritage-listed land and place, this does not equate to an unacceptable adverse effect on the place.

It is relevant to our finding that the proposal is acceptable with respect to its relationship with the Mt Meningoort Homestead and volcanic cone that:

- *The view from this location is altered from the image painted by Von Gerard, with matured trees and paddocks beyond.*
- *The iconic Von Gerard view, and views from the Mt Meningoort volcanic cone, are from the mountain slope behind the dwelling and are not generally available to the public. The limited public access is a relevant consideration.*
- *The solar energy facility would be masked from this location, by the plantings on the Meningoort property.*
- *Closer to the gardens immediately associated with the Homestead the solar energy facility would not be obvious or dominant. It would be effectively masked by vegetation.*

The findings of the Tribunal broadly support the conclusions made within the EWS which stated that the Previous Application:

'Would not result in an unacceptable level of visual change in the context of the altered view from the location where the Eugene Von Guerard painting was captured. This is due in part to the already modified view, and the vegetation which has matured between the time of the painting and now' (EWS Page 57).

6.3 Publicly accessible viewpoints conclusion

The EWS assessed the landscape character and visual impacts of the Previous Application through ten viewpoints selected from publicly accessible locations surrounding the Project site. This assessment concluded that:

'Although the project has a large footprint, the proposed solar panels will form a small element in views from the area surrounding the project. While there would be a change to views, the visual impact would be minor for even the most sensitive of viewers' (EWS pp 58).

Tribunal in their findings on impacts to Public Realm Views commented that:

'For such a large facility, opportunities to see it from the public realm are limited to the local road network, the Darlington Road, and elevated viewpoints associated with volcanic cones' (Para. 163). This section re-visited the ten viewpoints which formed the basis of the EWS LVIA within the context of the New Proposal. From this re-examination of views, it is evident that the layout of the new Proposal will be visually consistent with the Previous

Application. The proposed changes in the layout of the operations and maintenance facility, substation and battery storage area remain in a similar location to that which was assessed by the Previous Application and considered by the Tribunal. The photomontage prepared for the Proposal of viewpoint VP7 from Darlington-Corangamite Road, the closest view point to the Site, demonstrated that these features would be at a distance that, although visually noticeable, would not alter the views or change the character of the area in any appreciable way. The photomontage prepared for the new Proposal, illustrates that this remains the case.

The EWS concluded that impacts on views toward the Proposal would be low-negligible and in some cases, nil. The findings of this assessment for the new proposal are consistent with the EWS and find that the potential impacts on views towards the Proposal would be no more than low-negligible.

It is not the purpose of this assessment to pre-empt the position of the consent authority with regards to the change in views and landscape character of the new Proposal. However the new Proposal sits wholly within the planning envelope of the Previous Application and, as demonstrated by the preceding assessment, there appears to be no reason with regards to the design of the new Proposal for the findings to alter from those arrived at by the Tribunal for the Previous Application.

6.4 Residential dwellings

The assessment of impacts on views from residential dwellings was considered by the EWS. The EWS determined that potentially affected residential dwellings were either at such a distance that the proposed development would not bring about an appreciable change in views or visual impact, and that existing mature plantings around dwellings or in the wider landscape would assist in screening or filtering views towards the project. Further, the proposed 20 m perimeter landscape screening around the Proposal would be effective in managing any residual views from nearby dwellings.

The Tribunal had the benefit of undertaking site visits to several of the nearby dwellings on adjoining properties. The Tribunal's findings for visual impact in views from the private realm confirmed that:

...“the subject land is set back at sufficient distances from these small residential lots, and other farmhouses, and will be buffered by a landscaped edge. The proposed landscaping would have a similar appearance as other windbreak and shelterbelt plantings, albeit longer than some other examples in the landscape. Views to Mt Meningoort and over the wider plains would remain.” (Para. 186)

‘The impacts on residential amenity and outlook do not warrant refusal of a permit. We accept Mr Burge’s analysis that the proposed landscape plantings around the site boundary will mitigate views that could be gained from dwellings east and south of the subject land.’ (Para. 187)

As determined in Section 3 of this report, the site boundaries and key project features of this new Proposal are consistent with those of the Previous Application. A summary of the key considerations for views and visual impacts from residential dwellings is provided below:

- The nearest dwelling is approximately 450 m to the south-east of the Proposal;
- There are only 4 non – involved dwellings within 1.0 km of the Proposal;
- The proposed height of the solar panels remains at 4.0 m;
- Existing plantings around dwellings and shelterbelt plantings in the wider landscape will assist in screening or filtering of views towards the Proposal; and
- The Proposal will install a 20m wide landscape screen around much of the Site boundary.

Figure 6-23 shows the non-associated residential dwellings within approximately 1.0 km of the nearest site boundary. There are other residential dwellings to the east and south-east of the project boundary which are greater than 1.0 km from the nearest site boundary.



Figure 6-23 Residential dwellings within 1.0 km of a site boundary (landowner dwellings excluded)

Recognising that the new Proposal retains the original site boundaries, does not reduce setbacks from the originally considered residential dwellings, preserves the overall panel height of 4.0 m above ground level and retains the 20 m wide landscape buffer referred to by the Tribunal as being of benefit to views from both the public and private domains, there are no changes proposed by this new Proposal that would result in a material change in views or visual impact from residential dwellings that would alter conclusions reached in the EWS for the Previous Application.

In summary, residential dwellings are either at such a distance that the Proposal would not bring about an appreciable change in views or visual impact, existing vegetation would assist in screening or filtering views towards the project, and that the proposed 20 m perimeter landscape screening would effectively manage residual views from nearby dwellings.

This is supported by the photomontage shown and Viewpoint 7 which demonstrated that the change in views would not be discernible.

7. Assessment of the new Proposal in line with the Guideline

This section reviews the new Proposal against the requirements and considerations set out in the Solar Energy Facilities - Design and Development Guideline (2019). This review is based upon the re-examination of viewpoints provided above, and the Tribunal's findings for the Previous Application.

The Guideline sets out key steps and considerations to assist proponents and developers of SEFs at all stages of the planning and approvals process. Key steps in the process apply to the identification of suitable sites, design stages of the process, construction and operation and maintenance. Considerations relevant to views and visual impact are generally set out under the Design Stage considerations and include site selection and design of the project, cumulative visual impacts, landscape screening and the impact of security measures including visual impact and light spill.

For this new Proposal, there are no existing, proposed or approved solar farms in proximity to the Site, and the Proposal will connect into the existing high voltage transmission line that bisects the Site, so there is no requirement for additional offsite transmission infrastructure. For these reasons, the consideration of cumulative impacts is not applicable.

The Guideline recognises the value that local communities, Victorians, and Visitors alike place on landscapes with significant visual amenity due to their environmental, social and economic benefits. The Guideline also recognises the potential for the visual impact of a SEF and its associated infrastructure on its immediate location, and the broader landscape setting. Specifically, the Guideline considers the contributing elements of the visual impact of a SEF as:

- *the sensitivity of the landscape and its ability to absorb change*
- *the size, height, scale, spacing, colour and surface reflectivity of the facility's components*
- *the number of solar energy facilities located close to each other another within the same landscape*
- *the excessive removal, or planting of inappropriate species of vegetation*
- *the location and scale of other ancillary uses, buildings and works including transmission lines, battery storage units and associated access roads*
- *the proximity to environmentally sensitive areas such as public land, water courses and low-lying areas.*

The size, height, scale, spacing, colour and surface reflectivity of key Proposal features are described within section 4, and are incorporated within the photomontage digital modelling.

These aspects underpin the visual assessment of the Proposal and were considered in detail in the EWS for the Previous Application and by the Tribunal as set out at Section 3 of this report, and through the re-examination of the project in views described above.

The following sections review the key siting and design considerations for new SEFs.

7.1.1 Siting facility components

The Guideline provides several siting considerations to be made by Proponents to minimise potential impacts. Several of the siting considerations are relevant to landscape and visual impacts, and include:

- providing a minimum setback of 30m from any part of a component that makes up a solar pod or zone, or other building or structure, measured from the neighbouring property boundary;
- locating inverters that service a solar zone/pod towards the interior of the site, away for [sic] neighbouring property boundaries;
- grouping large electrical transfer, substation, battery storage unit, carparking or other ancillary buildings or structures in a single location accessible from a main road; and

- providing appropriate landscaping in an agreed setback area, to screen any buildings or solar components from view from a neighbouring sensitive use, main road or other highly visible public vantage points.

The new Proposal addresses the siting considerations described above as follows:

- The Proposal includes a 20m wide perimeter landscaping buffer and 10m wide asset protection zone. These measurable setbacks in conjunction with the 5m construction setback either side of the firebreak will exceed the required setbacks from neighbouring property boundaries;
- Inverters have been located towards the interior of the Site and along a central access road as shown on the 'Site plan' included at Appendix A;
- The onsite substation, battery storage, ancillary buildings and parking are located together, adjacent to an existing high-voltage transmission line along the western boundary which is located wholly within the Site boundary. This location is both away from nearby sensitive residential receptors and in proximity to an existing established all-weather road; and
- Extensive perimeter landscaping is proposed and has been designed to assist filtering or screening views from sensitive viewing locations.

7.1.2 Landscape Screening

The Guideline states that the solar farm proponent should establish landscape screening to reduce the visual impacts of the facility on neighbouring sensitive uses or public views from a main road.

The Guideline states that the Proponent should:

- use vegetation species that are indigenous to the area or region;
- locate vegetation along the perimeter of a site, within proposed setbacks;
- ensure vegetation will be of sufficient height, width and foliage density at maturity to screen relevant solar components and the associated built form from view;
- plant vegetation early in the construction stage; and
- plant vegetation in accordance with any fire management plan arrangements, to avoid increased bushfire risk exposure.

The new Proposal addresses the landscaping guidance as follows:

- The Proposal includes a vegetation screen (4 rows, 20 m wide) in conjunction with existing established vegetation around the perimeter of the Site (see the Site Plan);
- A local tree planting service (OZ Trees) has provided a list of suitable screening species to be included in the vegetation screens. The species selection has been based on their experience of planting tree lines in other areas of the wider landholding and in the local area where the Proposal is located (Appendix C);
- The Tribunal determined in the assessment of the Previous Application that the proposed vegetation screens were 'acceptable and sufficient' (Para. 191). As established in Section 3 of this report, this new Proposal adopts the previous landscape proposal considered in the EWS and by the Tribunal in the Previous Application.
- The vegetation screens will be installed as soon as practicable after construction begins onsite in line with the OZ Tree methodology provided in Appendix C.
- The management of the Vegetation has been assessed as part of the 'Bushfire Risk Assessment Report and Mitigation Plan' that supports the Planning Application. The management of the vegetation screens to reduce fire risk will not affect their ability to screen views of the Proposal.

7.1.3 Designing security measures

The Guideline recognises that the security measures required by solar facilities, such as fencing and lighting, may have off-site visual impacts. The Guideline requires that security measures:

- prevent light spill to nearby sensitive land uses and vegetated areas;
- use external lighting of a lux and colour output that provides safe levels of illumination while avoiding impacts on neighbouring habitat;
- be designed to consider the impact on the movement of wildlife within the area; and
- be set back an appropriate distance from a property boundary and use landscaping or vegetation to screen security fencing and lighting.

The new Proposal addresses the Designing of Security Measures guidance as follows:

The landscape screening is located along all site boundary visible from areas external to the Site where there is no existing vegetation. This arrangement has been designed to screen external views of the perimeter security fencing. The only section of boundary fence without screening is along a short section of security fencing that shares an internal boundary with the host property which backs onto Mt Meningoort. This area benefits from topographical screening along this section of the Proposal.

The only lighting on site will be minimal on demand or motion-activated, downward-facing lighting, restricted to a maximum of 4m above ground level. This will ensure that there will be no unacceptable offsite impacts due to light spill from the Proposal.

7.2 Impacts on landscape values

The photomontage included at Viewpoint 7 has demonstrated that this New Proposal will be visually consistent with the Previous Application as reviewed by the Tribunal. Other than the Draft Guidelines being formalised, there have been no change to relevant sections of the Guideline that are relevant to views, visual impact or landscape character.

The visual assessment undertaken in Section 6 of this report, confirmed that the New Proposal will sit low in the landscape and will closely follow the contours of the low lying, cleared and generally flat agricultural land.

The Proposal will not impact or detract from notable landscape features or views that are identified in the SWLVAS or the Corangamite Shire Planning Scheme including nearby features including Mount Meningoort and Lake Bookaar, or further, more elevated locations which include Mt Leura and the Camperdown Botanical Gardens. For these reasons, the New Proposal will not detrimentally impact on the landscape character of the area.

Summary of the Assessment of the new Proposal against the Guidelines

The Solar Energy Facilities - Design and Development Guideline (2019) was finalised following the lodgement of the Previous Application. The Guideline applies to any proposal for a new solar energy facility in Victoria, which includes this new Proposal. It is not the intention of the Guideline that each criterion be met, rather they set-out principles in a stepwise manner to assist proponents with site selection and design of new Projects. Three components of the Design Stage are relevant to a consideration of views, visual impact and landscape character and can be broadly defined as site selection, landscaping and security measures.

The following sets out the key criteria relevant to landscape and visual impact considerations for a new SEF and how these objectives are met by the Proposal:

- The Proposal is located within predominantly cleared farmland. As such, minimal vegetation removal is required to enable the Proposal's development.

- The Proposal is located on low lying, relatively flat area of land below topographical features such as Mt Meningoort. The siting and design of the Proposal and its components avoids the need for unnecessary or excessive earthworks or changes to the natural topography of the landscape.
- The Proposal has been considered in light of the cultural heritage and landscape values of the area, particularly, those captured in the paintings by Eugene Von Guerard and the landscapes of local and state significance as acknowledged by the SWLVAS, and referred to by various overlays within the Corangamite Planning Scheme. These same values were considered by the Tribunal for the Previous Application. The findings of the Tribunal on the effects of a project of the same size, scale and proportion to the Proposal was that *'we do not consider the proposal would fundamentally change the rural and agricultural character associated with farmland that sits between cones west of the lakes and wetlands'* (Para. 190).
- The Proposal has been sited to avoid the loss of native vegetation and biodiversity. Recognising that the Proposal is located on cleared farmland and includes the planting of substantive landscape buffers of native vegetation along the perimeter of the Site, the Proposal will bring about a net recruitment of native vegetation in the area.
- The Proposal has been designed to connect directly to the high voltage electricity lines that bisect the Site. Connecting the Proposal to existing onsite transmission infrastructure negates the need for any additional offsite transmission infrastructure that could have additional offsite amenity impacts.
- The Proposal is located away from urban areas and any areas of urban growth. Camperdown, the nearest township is over 8 km southeast of the nearest Site boundary.
- The Proposal provides generous setback distances to residential dwellings, reducing the potential for visual impacts (the nearest dwelling is approximately 450m from the Proposal's boundary and there are only four dwellings in total, located within 1 km of the Proposal).
- Section 6 of this report has assessed the project in views from key publicly accessible locations in proximity to the project including Camperdown, views from elevated hills recognised by the planning scheme, tourist locations and public roads to determine the context of the project in views and the character of the area. This assessment concluded that the project will sit low in the landscape and will not compete with or impact on views and landscape features that define the character of the region.
- The views and assessment methodology of this report are the same as that considered by the Tribunal which found that the visual impact of the Previous Application would not result in an unacceptable level of visual impact.
- The Proposal has ready access to Darlington – Camperdown Road to the east of the Site, which is a major road. There are no locations along this road where the visual impact of the Proposal is considered to be greater than low.
- The landscape assessment has considered views from elevated locations, the surrounding road network and heritage areas to determine the sensitivity of the landscape and its ability to absorb change. It is concluded that the landscape in which the Proposal is located is one that can absorb the type and nature of potential change in the landscape. It is apparent that the Tribunal did not disagree with these findings for the Previous Application.

Based on the above, it is considered that the Proposal is wholly consistent with the design and siting considerations of the Guideline.

8. Conclusion

This report has reviewed the potential for impacts to views, amenity and landscape character that may be brought about by a new Proposal to construct and operate a 200 MW (ac) solar facility located at 520 Meningoort Road, Bookaar.

The new Proposal is to be located at the same site and within the same footprint as a Previous Application, Planning Permit Application No. PP2018/060 for a similarly sized project. The Previous Application was issued a notice of Refusal to Grant a Permit, by the Corangamite Shire. The Previous Application also received several public submissions including concerns regarding impact to specific views and vistas, landscape character, views from nearby residential dwellings and farming properties, and the view captured by landscape artist Eugene Von Gerard overlooking the Meningoort Homestead. Following Council's issue of a notice of Refusal to Grant a Permit, the Proponent initiated a review of Council's decision by VCAT. The submitter's concerns listed above, formed part of the key matters considered by the Tribunal.

The Tribunal concluded that the Previous Application would be acceptable in the context of the existing views, landscape character and amenity of the area, and the view captured by landscape artist Eugene Von Guerard. The Tribunal was also satisfied that concerns relating to glint, glare and any loss of native vegetation can also be appropriately managed by the Proposal. The Tribunal's findings concerning these aspects are summarised in Section 3 of this report.

Despite the above matters regarding views, character and amenity being considered acceptable, the Previous Application was however rejected on the grounds of further detail being required regarding bushfire risk and hydrology.

This new Proposal has been prepared to provide greater detail in response to the VCAT decision regarding bushfire risk, and hydrological concerns. As a result, the project layout has been slightly altered.

Section 4 of this report has reviewed the new Proposal and the changes made to the layout as a result of the more detailed information provided by the bushfire risk and hydrological studies. These changes to the Proposal layout were reviewed against the key components of the Previous Application, which the Tribunal considered in their findings to be acceptable having regard to objectors concerns for views, visual impact and landscape character. This review of the proposed changes determined that changes to the amended layout of the new Proposal are confined to the location of the required site access, array spacing, and siting of the onsite substation, battery area and operations buildings.

For consistency, the changes proposed by the new Proposal were assessed through a re-examination of the ten viewpoints that formed the basis of the EWS and which informed the findings of the Tribunal. The re-examination of the new Proposal through these ten viewing locations confirmed that the proposed changes would be minor and more importantly would not be readily discernible in views towards the Proposal from the surrounding area.

The proposed provision of landscape screening is consistent with the plans reviewed by the Tribunal. This landscape screening is considered to be acceptable and sufficient for filtering or screening views to the Proposal, upon establishment and maturity of the vegetation. The Proposal is committed to planting the landscape screen early in the construction phase of the Proposal.

For the above reasons, it is considered that the observations and conclusions made for the Previous Application within the EWS are relevant to the new Proposal which stated that the project would:

...form a small element in views from the area surrounding the project. While there would be a change to views, the visual impact would be minor for even the most sensitive of viewers' (Page 53),

and would:

'sit low within the landscape and will not be visually prominent. This is due to the low-lying nature of the site and the low profile of the panels which mould to the contours of the land and the subject site. Further, the distance for any sensitive receptors or key views is at such a distance that the panels will not be a dominant feature in the view' (Page 54).

Following the VCAT hearing, DELWP published the *Solar energy facilities – design and development guideline* in August 2019. The Guideline sets out principles in a stepwise manner to assist proponents with site selection and design of new projects through to construction and operation. Key considerations relevant to views and visual impact are set out under the design stage consideration and can be broadly defined under three sections including site selection, landscaping and security measures.

The Guideline also suggests consideration should be given to cumulative impacts that may be brought about through locating similar facilities and grid connecting infrastructure in close proximity to one another. As there are no other existing or known proposed solar farms in proximity to the Proposal, and the Proposal is proposed to connect directly into an existing high voltage transmission line bisecting the Site, there is no potential for cumulative impacts.

Section 6 of this report, undertook a re-examination of the potential for impacts to views and landscape character of the new Proposal. This assessment, when read in conjunction with the EWS, is consistent with the Guideline with respect to considerations set out for views and visual impact and landscape character. It is considered that the new Proposal meets all siting and design criteria relevant to consideration of views, visual impact and landscape character.