

# **Appendix L Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan**



## **COROP SOLAR FARM**

# **COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

Issue Date: July 2022



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Corop Solar Farm is being developed by the Leeson Group, a Melbourne based renewable energy company which has successfully developed multiple solar farms throughout Victoria.

Having considered land in a number of locations the site was selected due to the low number of dwellings in proximity to the land, limited flora and fauna values being a substantially altered agricultural landscape, notable capacity for solar energy generation and connection to the 220kV transmission line.

The proposal requires a Planning Permit Application (PPA) to be submitted to Campaspe Shire Council. In considering an application, the council must give any persons potentially affected an opportunity to comment on the proposal.

## 2 INTENTION OF CONSULTATION

Leeson Group's consultation is primarily intended to inform, consult and involve stakeholders so decisions about planning, construction, operation and eventual decommissioning of the solar farm are made in the best interests of all parties.

A second and important reason for engaging with the community is to support the growth of renewable energy activities in the region. Leeson Group will provide technical information in plain English so the community is aware of the benefits and opportunities the growth of the renewables industry can provide in Victoria.

## 3 STAKEHOLDERS

The Corop Solar farm proposal has two primary groups of stakeholders:

- approvals and review bodies
- community members and groups potentially affected or interested

### Approvals and review

The likely approvals and review bodies include: Campaspe Shire Council; the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP); Ausnet; Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA); VicRoads; Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority; and emergency services.

Most of the contact with these organizations is related to technical and planning matters and they are therefore not covered in this engagement plan. However, early meetings are included in the table of consultation.

Campaspe Shire Council is being consulted regarding appropriate consultation.

### Community

- Adjacent landowners, businesses and tenants on Old Corop Road, Geodetic Road, Bedwell Road and Carag Road
- Environment and sustainability groups
- Local people interested in direct or contract employment with the project
- Traditional owners

The project requires a Cultural Heritage Management Plan which will be developed in consultation with the Taungurung Land and Waters Council.

## 4 OPPORTUNITIES, ISSUES AND RESPONSES

The planning permit application, planning report and associated documents will be available to the public when the application is submitted. However, they are long and technically detailed documents that can be difficult for non-technical stakeholders to navigate.

The table below summarises likely areas of community interest that Leeson Group will address during the planning stages. Fact sheets will be prepared in plain English and distributed as required as the project progresses.

Potential issue or opportunity	Response
<b>Landscaping and visual impact on nearby residences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leeson Group is meeting with landowners to understand their issues.</li> <li>The proposal allows for screening on all boundaries of the solar farm except for Bedwell Road as stage 1 and stage 2 adjoin along this boundary.</li> <li>A landscaping plan will be prepared: that is likely to be required as a condition of any planning permit.</li> <li>A fact sheet has been prepared to provide more information.</li> </ul>
<b>Ecology and habitat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A flora and fauna report has been prepared. The report's recommended management measures will be implemented.</li> <li>There may be opportunities for local groups to be involved in monitoring bird behavior.</li> <li>Additional fauna information prepared by Green Edge Environmental responding to concerns raised by objectors to the application for planning permit.</li> </ul>
<b>Potential for glare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The composition and positioning of the panels, proposed screening and fencing means there is unlikely to be any glare effect.</li> <li>A fact sheet has been prepared to explain the technical elements of the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Traffic impact during construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Traffic Impact Assessment has been prepared. The report's recommended management measures will be implemented.</li> <li>A traffic management plan (TMP) will likely be a condition of any planning permit. Notice of any disruption will be provided in a timely manner: the notification process will be included in the TMP.</li> <li>Leeson Group will meet with neighbouring businesses to understand any critical times or seasons so project planning can take it into consideration.</li> <li>A fact sheet is being prepared to provide more information.</li> <li>Traffic impact assessment further information responding to concerns raised by objectors to the application for planning permit.</li> </ul>
<b>Likely damage to roads during construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Traffic Impact Assessment has been prepared. The report's recommended management measures will be implemented.</li> <li>Leeson Group will continue to meet with Council and neighbours to understand specific issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Construction impacts: noise, dust, access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A construction management plan (CMP) will likely be a condition of any planning permit.</li> <li>Nearby residents will be given early information about activities which may affect them in a timely manner: the notification process will be included in the CMP.</li> <li>A fact sheet has been prepared to provide more information.</li> </ul>
<b>Potential employment opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leeson Group, Construction Contractors and Project Owners will, where possible, use local contractors for construction and operation of the farm.</li> <li>During construction there will be significant employment opportunities: we expect up</li> </ul>

Potential issue or opportunity	Response
	<p>to 400 full time workers over a 24 months construction period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment over the operational life is expected to be around 20 full-time and 15 part-time staff.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Operational issues: eg security, land management</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use management protocols will be developed to cover weed and pest management. The solar array areas will be kept weed free by routine spraying and appropriate land use and biosecurity measures. Fire risk will be reduced through pasture management, fire breaks and provision of access, water and pumps as required.</li> <li>• The entire site will be fenced with signage at regular intervals warning of high voltage; CCTV will be installed.</li> <li>• Dual solar farm and agricultural use are being assessed for the project, grazing of sheep, cropping and planting of appropriate vegetation to reduce maintenance, increase environmental benefit and provide greater agricultural outcome is being considered and developed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunity for community benefits</b></p>	<p>Opportunities will be developed in consultation with the local community. Some examples from another Victorian project developed by Leeson Group include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local sourcing of goods and services where feasible. The local contractor worked to identify capability in the local community and maximise opportunities for local suppliers to participate in the project.</li> <li>• Collaborating with the District Hospital to support local infrastructure upgrades to existing facilities within the hospital.</li> <li>• Working with the local councils to explore the potential for smart infrastructure upgrades in the local area e.g. solar powered street lighting.</li> <li>• A biodiversity recovery project focused on the areas impacted by the 2019/2020 bushfires within the Victorian region.</li> <li>• A fact sheet has been prepared to provide example from other projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on farming in the region</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are aiming to create a dual use of the site. Assessment so far suggests the most effective and sustainable method to manage the land is to implement grazing</li> <li>• Cropping is still being assessed. Viability requires further investigation of the land, soil, drainage and paddock access. This would be carried out after planning approval.</li> <li>• Planting of appropriate vegetation in certain areas to reduce maintenance, increase environmental benefit and provide greater agricultural outcome is also being considered. Recent trial project in North America by the project partners have found the success with a combination of grazing, planting and bees and more information can be found at <a href="https://www.enelgreenpower.com/stories/articles/2020/10/aurora-solar-plant-sustainable">https://www.enelgreenpower.com/stories/articles/2020/10/aurora-solar-plant-sustainable</a></li> </ul>

## 5 CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Leeson Group has already engaged with several stakeholders, and will continue to do so through the planning, construction and operation of the project.

Campaspe Shire	Various preliminary meetings to gather information, advice and requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further meetings will be scheduled as planning progresses.</li> </ul>
EPA	Phone call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirmed no requirement for approvals</li> </ul>
Country Fire Authority	Phone call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreement on defensible space, access arrangements, likely permit conditions for water supply, access etc</li> </ul>
Ausnet	Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preliminary applications approved, discussion on detailed design underway.</li> <li>Further meetings will be scheduled as planning progresses</li> </ul>
Landowner of proposed site	Various meetings	<p>Consultation which resulted in agreement regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site configuration</li> <li>Screening for dwellings</li> <li>Access between proposed lots</li> </ul> <p>Further meetings will be scheduled as planning progresses.</p>
Adjacent landowners	Individual meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various discussions regarding proposed project, proximity to the dwellings and suggested screening, potential impact on farm business, flooding, salinity and other environmental issues</li> <li>Further meetings proposed, see Section 6.</li> </ul>
Taungurung Land and Waters Council	Discussion with specialist consultant	Cultural Heritage Management Plan being developed
Goulburn Broken CMA	Email discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter confirming no objection to the development</li> </ul>
DELWP	Email discussion through Campaspe Shire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response to DELWP request for further information 7 November 2019</li> <li>Correspondence on land licenses 4 June 2019</li> </ul>

## 6 CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

<b><u>Ongoing consultation</u></b>	Council	Planning submission, DELWP and Department of Transport (Vicroads) responses, Cultural Heritage Management Plan, Objections and consultation during Covid-19.	Ongoing – Extension of time for submission of further information. Updated details in December 2020 submission of further information.
<b><u>Community Consultation 2020</u></b>	Neighbouring landowners PPA submitters	<p>Offer video or phone meetings to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided additional information on project as per this document.</li> <li>Answer questions and provide information about the project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer of meetings and additional consultation.</li> <li>Additional response reports written by Traffic, Hydrology and Environmental Consultants.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand likely activities and understand how they may be affected during construction</li> <li>• Discuss any specific issues raised</li> <li>• Gather local knowledge about climate, environment and business operations</li> <li>• Discuss concerns from objections relating to all aspects.</li> <li>• Confirm Leeson Group’s intent to be a good neighbor.</li> <li>• Provide plain English information on solar farming and the Corop project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of native landscaping screening to all boundaries.</li> <li>• Inform the final planning report and associated documents.</li> <li>• Provide input to management plans likely to be conditions of any permit</li> <li>• Community is better informed and has the opportunity to be involved in the planning process.</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Community Consultation Night – Rushworth February 2021</u></b></p>	Neighbouring landowners, PPA submitters, Community, Businesses.	Community consultation session in early February 2021 to update the community, businesses, and individuals on the project submission to council, project progress, and discuss concerns relating to the project.	Providing all stakeholders with a better understanding of the project through personal engagement with representation from Leeson Group and project owners.
<p><b><u>Community Consultation August 2022</u></b></p>	Neighbouring landowners, PPA submitters, Community, Businesses.	Update community, businesses, and individuals on the project submission to council project progress, and discuss concerns relating to the project.	Providing all stakeholders with a better understanding of the project through personal engagement with representation from Leeson Group and project owners.

## 7 ONGOING CONSULTATION

Leeson Group is committed to continuing and improving its consultation as the project develops.

### Update and review

If a planning permit is issued, further consultation will build on the outcomes of the consultation to August 2022. It will also respond to any conditions attached to the permit.

### Management plans

Any management plans (eg landscape, traffic, construction, environment) required as conditions of the planning permit are likely to have community engagement sections. These would likely include:

- Processes for early consultation
- Notification timeframes for works or other activities
- Means for resolving any complaints or issues.

### Community benefits

Once planning approval is obtained there will be consultation with the community about benefit sharing. This will likely include a workshop or drop in session where we show examples of other benefit



sharing in solar projects, then work with the community to design a program that suits the district. Areas to be covered could include:

- Social sustainability activities
- Investing in local community infrastructure
- Supporting local groups, facilities, and projects
- Local industry participation

## Outcomes

Over the past twelve months the ongoing consultation and engagement with the community has taken place (including emails, phone calls, and meetings) and additional features have been included, we have made the following main updates to the planning application:

- Traffic:
  - Changing the proposed entrances to site from 5 to 3 with an additional 4th entrance for operations and emergency vehicle access (CFA) on Geodetic North Rd.
  - Vehicle passing bays on Old Corop Road and Bedwell Road.
  - Upgrade to the existing bus stop on Old Corop Road - Bendigo Murchison Rd.
- Additional locations for visual impact assessment including photo montages.
- Glint and Glare Report.
- Additional landscape screening on Bedwell Rd.
- Acoustic Report.
- Agricultural Land Assessment.
- Bushfire Risk Assessment.
- Hydrologic Report.
- Ecology Assessment.

Finally, in order to mitigate possible flooding problems in the properties and knowing that this has happened in previous years and also taking into account that it is a complicated area due to the existence of native vegetation in it; the next stage of the project is planned to develop a detail action plan.

## 8 INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED

Planning for the solar farm provides an opportunity to share plain English information with interested community members.

### Key messages

#### Overarching

- Leeson Group is an Australian company working with local farmers and businesspeople to develop Victoria's renewable energy industry.
- Solar farms are an ideal use of compact areas of land in northern Victoria.
- Solar farms have a minimal environmental impact, especially given the exceptional benefits they provide.
- The project will have a significant positive impact on the Victorian State Renewable Energy Target

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### Project specific

- Leeson Group will purchase the land once the project is ready to be constructed
- Leeson Group's Corop solar farm has been carefully planned to use less productive land. The land is no longer irrigated and has some issues with flooding and salinity. Grazing and cropping will be continued where possible on the property
- The farm will deliver 320MW of electricity – enough to supply a large area of country Victoria with a large 100MW battery to provide energy security to Victoria
- The project will create a positive social impact through community benefit programs and local employment during construction and operation
- The farm has a design life of 40 years. If after that time it does not continue, the land can easily return to agricultural use.

### Fact sheets

Leeson Group will prepare fact sheets which will provide general information but can also be used in discussion with adjacent landowners.

The fact sheets will be made available to Council and the local newspaper to generate interest in the project and its benefits for the region. They will include pictures of the type of equipment being used and a clear explanation of how the panels move.

- Corop Solar Farm fast facts: what are we building, timeline, employment, benefits for Victoria and the region
- What is a solar farm?: why are solar farms designed and built the way they are?
- Solar panels and glare: how the panels move, how glare is managed, some misconceptions explained
- Maintaining a solar farm: what's involved in the operation of a solar farm once it's commissioned
- Protecting the environment: flora and fauna, sustainable farming, eventual decommissioning
- Community benefits: examples from other projects, how the community can be involved.