Ecological Assessment - 4785 Western Highway, Ledcourt

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Botanist and Environmental Consultants

1. Background

ACEnergy Pty Ltd are planning to develop a solar farm on 4785 Western Highway, Ledcourt. Danny Wilkinson, Project Development Manager provided copies of Site plans of the property, photos and background information and contracted White Gums Consultancy to survey and assess the site. Also provided was a copy of a letter of request for further information, from the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP). That letter, dated 4/08/2020 from Michael Juttner Manager, Development Approvals and Design, Renewables, outlined exactly what ACEnergy was required to provide. The pertinent sections of this letter are provided below:

Application for Planning Permit PA2000862 4785 WESTERN HIGHWAY LEDCOURT VIC 3385 USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SOLAR ENERGY FACILITY AND UTILITY INSTALLATION, AND ALTER ACCESS TO A ROAD IN A ROAD ZONE CATEGORY 1

…. submitted to the Minister for Planning C/- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (the Department) on 11 May 2020 and amended on 24 July 2020 pursuant to s57A of the Planning and Environment Act (1987).

A preliminary assessment of the amended application has revealed that further information pursuant to Section 54(1) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 is required in order to properly consider your application

….Further information required is:

- An amended Site Vegetation Report containing a survey conducted by an appropriately qualified botanist/ecologist, of the presence of native vegetation between the existing driveway and the recently cropped field proposed to contain the solar farm, including any required to be removed to create the solar farm access road.
- An amended set of plans, similar to those submitted with the application but showing:
  - The location of any native vegetation discovered by the botanist/ecologist as required above.
- An amended town planning report that includes information about the proposed battery energy storage systems, including whether they are ancillary to the solar farm. The report should also correct any inconsistencies including the following:
  - The reference to there being no existing remnant vegetation existing on the subject site
  - The correction of references to the removal of the existing tree (sections 3.1, 5.4, 8.5.2)

Section 8.5.2 updated to reflect the findings of the botanist/ecologist as described above

2. Ecological Survey

On Wednesday 12th August 2020, Neil and Wendy Marriott botanist and environmental consultants inspected the site and recorded all flora observed. This report is to inform amendments to the Site Vegetation Report as requested by Michael Juttner and outlined above.

2.1 Native Plant Species Recorded during Survey

A. Internal Roadway to Residence

This roadway runs south from the Western Highway to the residence and farm sheds. It is composed of some indigenous and more non-indigenous native trees that have all been planted by the landowner for aesthetics, shade and shelter. The understorey is dominated

by exotic weeds and pasture plants, with few individuals of several species of remnant natural native grasses and herbs.

Table 1. All species observed

These include 8 species of grass and 4 other graminoid lifeforms.

Acacia pycnantha Golden Wattle
Anthosachne scabra Native Wheat-grass
Astroloma humifusa Cranberry Heath
Austrostipa densiflora Dense Spear-grass
Austrostipa scabra Rough Spear-grass
Chloris truncata Windmill Grass
Crassula decumbens Spreading Stonecrop
Dianella revoluta Black Anther Flax-lily
Drosera glanduligera Scarlet Sundew
Drosera peltata Pale Sundew
Eucalyptus camaldulensis River Red-gum
#Eucalyptus cladocalyx nana Bushy Sugar-gum
#Eucalyptus polyanthemos Red Box
**Genista monspessulana* Montpellier Broom
Gonocarpus elatus Tall Raspwort
Kennedia prostrata Running Postman
Lomandra filifolia ssp coriacea Wattle Matrush
Lomandra nana Dwarf Matrush
Microlaena stipoides Weeping Grass
Pellargonium rodneyanum Magenta Storksbill
Pimelea humilis Common Rice-flower
Poa sieberiana Grey Tussock-grass
Pseudognaphalium luteoalbum Common Cudweed
Rytidosperma caespitosa Common Wallaby-grass
Rytidosperma setacea Bristly Wallaby-grass
Schoenus apogon Common Bog-sedge

2.2 Paddock with Canola crop

Inspection of the canola cropped area showed that the existing tree to be retained is Red Gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and no remnants of native grasses or other vegetation exist. Discussion with the landowner confirmed the likelihood of this lack of groundflora as he advised that he had sprayed out the entire paddock with 25 litres of Roundup systemic herbicide. This is in order to create a clean weed free paddock for cropping purposes, and would at the same time have killed off any relicts of native flora.

3. Native vegetation required to be removed to create the solar farm access road

The vast majority of the native vegetation recorded in Table 1. above will not be impacted by the solar farm development. Table 2. below records the native vegetation that will be impacted by the construction of the solar farm access road.

Table 2. native vegetation that will be impacted

These include 1 small indigenous woody life form, 3 small non-indigenous woody life forms, 5 graminoid species, 4 herbaceous species and numerous exotic weeds.

Acacia pycnantha Golden Wattle –small sapling
Anthosachne scabra Native Wheat-grass –several small tussocks
Astroloma humifusa Cranberry Heath -1 established plant
Austrostipa densiflora Dense Spear-grass –several small tussocks
Chloris truncata Windmill Grass -1 small plant
Dianella revoluta Black Anther Flax-lily -1 small plant
#Eucalyptus cladocalyx nana Bushy Sugar-gum -2 small saplings
#Eucalyptus polyanthemos Red Box --1 small sapling
**Genista monspessulana* Montpellier Broom –numerous small plants
Gonocarpus elatus Tall Raspwort –small number of plants
Kennedia prostrata Running Postman -1 small plant
Poa sieberiana Grey Tussock-grass -1 small plant
Schoenus apogon Common Bog-sedge -several small plants
KEY:
= non indigenous native tree
* = Declared Noxious Weed

Diagram 1. Existing driveway and proposed access track.

Location diagram of part of site, showing:
in AQUA = access road to farm surveyed
FINE BLUE LINES =proposed access track to solar farm
RED LINE over aqua = area where ground flora vegetation exists

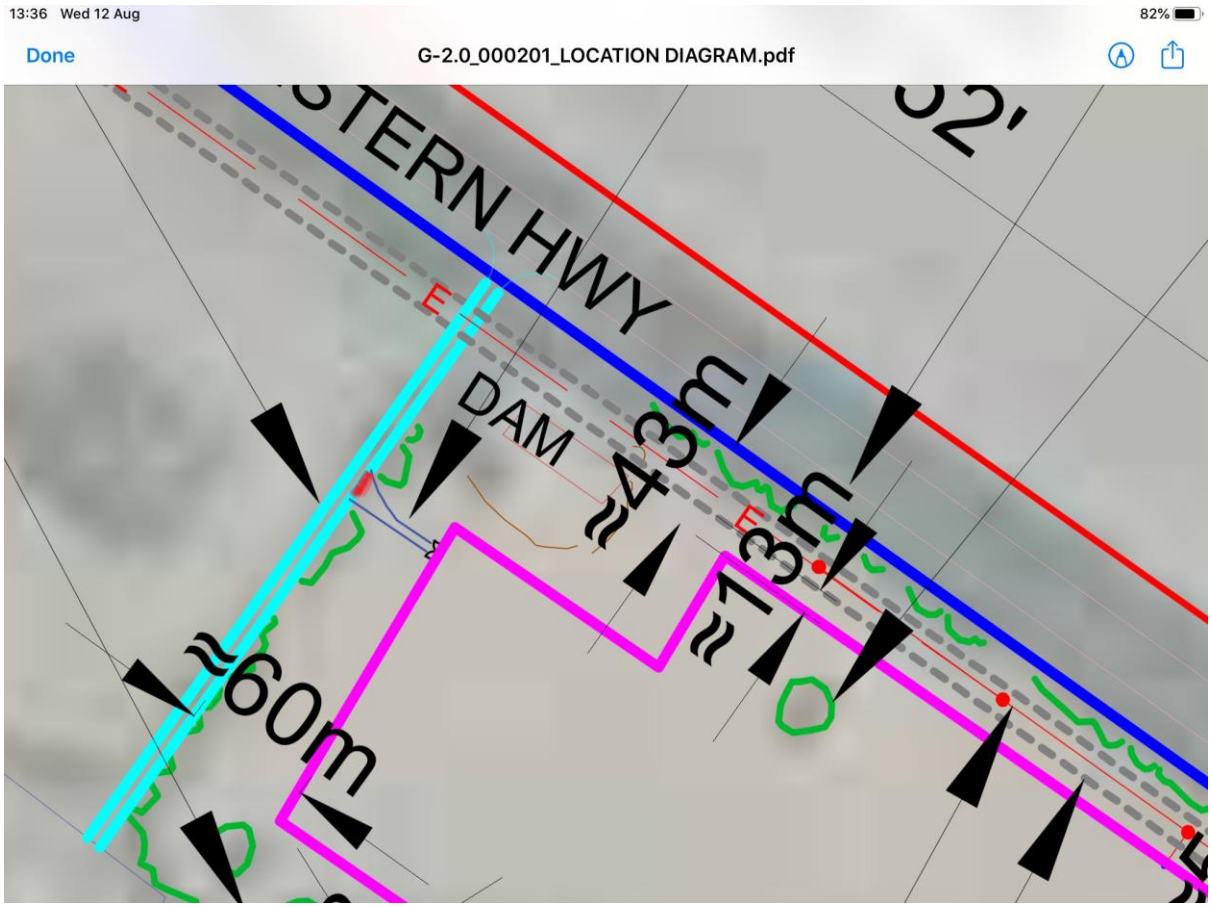
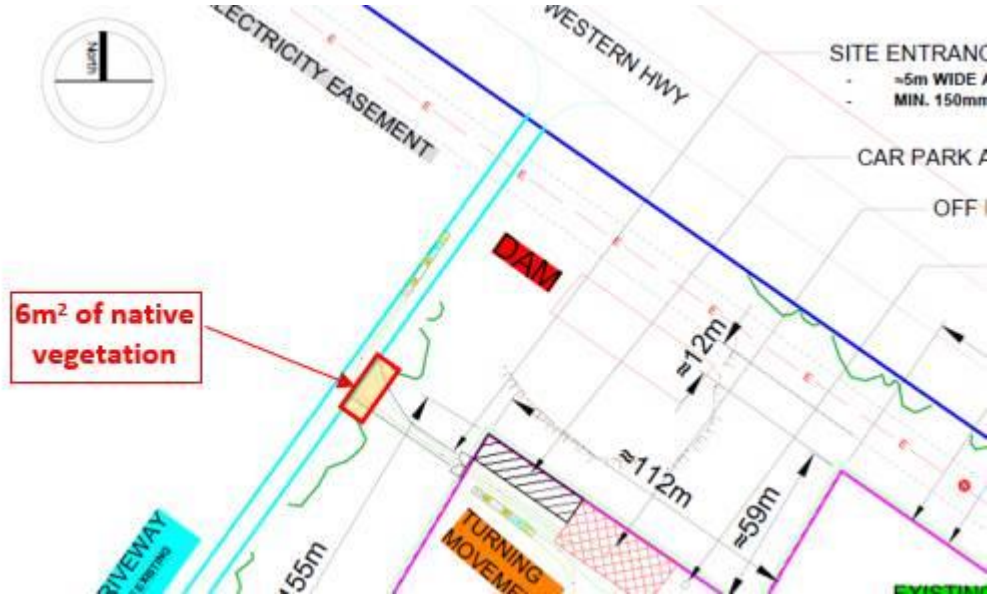


Diagram 2. Close up of Existing driveway and proposed access track.
-showing circa 6m2 of native vegetation proposed to be removed



4. Summary

From our survey it is clear that native vegetation will need to be removed as listed in Table 2. above. However the area proposed to be cleared for the access track is a small area roughly 6m2, and is infested with exotic weeds, including the Declared Noxious weed Montpellier Broom, which will need to be removed or sprayed out by the landholder regardless of the planning application outcome. All trees in the area proposed to be cleared for the access track are regrowth less than 10 years of age.

It is also worth noting that the remnant native ground flora exists along the entire length of the driveway in to the farm, and the site chosen for the track in to the solar farm is one of the least diverse. This means that these remnant mature individuals can continue to seed through the new environment.