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Newstead Solar Farm

Planning Permit Amendment Application

16 May 2022

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1. Background

Planning permit PA2000883 was issued by the Minister for Planning on 15 April 2021 for use and development of the Newstead Solar Farm. The application initially proposed a 10MW solar farm however was reduced to 5MW through an amendment to the application following public notice and in response to objector concerns.

The permit allowed use and development of a 5MW solar farm, associated infrastructure and native vegetation removal. The approval included installation of an approximate 250 metre length of 22kV overhead line to connect the project to the national electricity grid north of the site. A Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) did not form part of the approval.

An amendment to the permit under section 72 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 was approved on 14 July 2021, deleting conditions 10a, 10b and 10e. These conditions related to specific traffic measures and road upgrades and were removed after an alternative traffic route was adopted for the project.

To date, no plans have been endorsed under condition 1 of the permit.

2. Proposed Amendments

This request seeks to amend the permit and the plans associated with the project. The key proposed changes are:

- Reduced solar farm size from 5MW to 3MW and therefore reduced project site area and land involved.
- Addition of a BESS.

The above changes have resulted in the below flow-on changes to suit:


- Layout of solar arrays and security fence
- Location of inverter/transformer (PCS)
- Route of HV line from the solar farm to the point of connection into the Powercor network.
- Location of solar farm site access point and internal access road layout.

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Table 1 below provides further details on the proposed changes.

Table 1 Description of proposed amendments

PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT
Solar Farm size	The solar farm as currently approved is for 5MW in capacity. The solar farm capacity has been reduced to approximately 3MW, resulting in less solar arrays and a smaller sized site.
Battery Energy Storage System	The project now includes a proposed 5MW/10MWhr BESS (defined as utility installation under the planning scheme which forms part of the existing approval) which will enable the project to capture and store any excess solar generation to provide stable and dispatchable energy as required to into the local network. The proposed BESS will also be able to provide network services including frequency control and ancillary services that will help stabilise the local area network.

PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT
	<p>The proposed BESS will utilise the key electrical equipment that will also be used by the solar farm, including the PCS, RMU and point of connection with Powercor.</p> <p>The only additional components required for the BESS include up to four containerised battery units, using lithium-ion technology.</p> <div data-bbox="411 504 1204 907" style="text-align: center;">  <p data-bbox="1050 517 1177 539">Preliminary</p> </div> <p data-bbox="411 943 694 965"><i>Indicative BESS container</i></p>
<p>Inverter/s, switchgear and transformer</p>	<p>The inverter, transformer and associated switchgear, referred to as a Power Conversion System (PCS), was previously sited in the northeast corner of the site. With the updated layout, the PCS is now proposed to be further south, more central to the solar arrays which reduces the amount of cabling and trenching required for the solar farm.</p>

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PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT
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Examples of a containerised PCS

22kV line	<p>A 22kV HV line will connect the solar farm to the Powercor distribution network. The current approved route for this line in the existing planning permit is from an inverter in the northwestern corner of the site, traversing Parcel PC373222M and Allot. 8~12\PP3562, before running up the eastern side of the Captains Gully Road reserve to an existing pole.</p> <p>The proposed amended route would be similar. The line would connect from the solar farm's PCS and RMU, exiting the site generally in the northwest. From the site, rather than traversing Parcel PC373222M and Allot. 8~12\PP3562, the line would run directly to the Captains Gully Road reserve before extending north, either in the western or eastern road verge. The line would then likely connect into the existing line in Captains Gully Road approximately 200m south of the intersection with Pyrenees Highway, or would extend to the existing lines in the intersection.</p> <p>The precise alignment of the new line works and point of connection into the existing network is yet to be determined and is subject to detailed design by Powercor. Whether the line in the road reserve is overhead or underground or a combination of</p>
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PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT
	both is also yet to be determined, however is likely to be overhead. The section of line within the solar farm site will be underground.
Additional equipment	<p>The plans previously approved do not show some minor additional ancillary equipment that will be required for the project. To ensure these are captured in the approval, these are shown on the amended plans and indicative examples provided below.</p> <p><u>Ring Main Unit</u></p> <p>A ring main unit block (RMU) is required to house the network protection equipment, metering equipment and SCADA system for monitoring and control of the solar farm. The RMU is an above ground prefabricated unit which will be located on the solar farm site. The 22kV line connects into this RMU before connecting into the PCS. The final design of RMU's are tailored to the project, based on detailed electrical design at the tender and procurement stage. An indicative example of an RMU is provided below.</p>  <p><i>Example of a Ring Main Unit</i></p> <p><u>Auxiliary Transformer</u></p> <p>An auxiliary transformer is required on site in order to provide an LV supply to the BESS container. The auxiliary transformer will step down the 22kV HV cable from the RMU to a 400V LV supply.</p>

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PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT
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Example of an auxiliary transformer.

Spares Container

A 20 or 40ft shipping container is proposed for the storage of spare parts.

Water tank for fire fighting

A minimum 288kL capacity water tank for fire fighting would be installed onsite to Country Fire Authority (CFA) specifications, in accordance with the CFA’s *Design Guidelines and Model Requirements, Renewable Energy Facilities* (V3 March 2022). The tank will be located near the main site entrance as required by the CFA. The tank would not be connected to town water. It would be filled up during construction using imported water and remain a static water supply only for use in the event of a fire.

It is not proposed to connect the tank to a hydrant system on site, as the tank is located at a sufficient distance to the BESS and PCS. Recent consultation with the CFA in April 2022 has indicated that this is acceptable and the CFA will review this in further detail through their review of management plans post-consent (refer also Section 3).

<p>Site access, internal road</p>	<p>The previously approved site access point is off Captains Gully Road, approximately 300m south of its intersection with Clarke Lane. The proposed site access point has been shifted southward by approximately 170m to suit the updated layout.</p> <p>The CFA’s <i>Design Guidelines and Model Requirements, Renewable Energy Facilities</i> (V3 March 2022) specifies that a perimeter road is not required for a Micro Solar Facilities (a solar facility that is 5MW or under) unless it includes a battery. In April 2022 during a meeting with the CFA, the CFA clarified that in this scenario a perimeter road only needs to be around the BESS, not the entire solar farm facility. As such the revised layout includes a perimeter road around the BESS and PCS area. The perimeter road also serves as turning area allowing large vehicles,</p>
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PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT																
	<p>including fire fighting vehicles to use this road to enter and leave the site in a forward direction.</p> <p>The site access driveway and internal road would be an all-weather unsealed road suitable for the largest vehicle and a minimum of four meters wide. The road geometry as drawn on the amended site layout is indicative and subject to detailed civil design.</p>																
Construction setdown/ laydown area	<p>The original DA proposed the northwestern corner of the site for the construction setdown area. For practical, logistical reasons, and to suit the updated layout, the temporary construction compound will instead be located in the vacant space south of the BESS area, adjacent to the proposed spares container.</p>																
Subject Land	<p>With the reduction of the land area required for the project, the number of land parcels affected have reduced. The previously approved footprint occupied part of the following freehold parcels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8~12\PP3562 • PC373222M • 1/TP22049 • 30~12/PP3562 <p>Now with the reduced project size, PC373222M is the only freehold parcel required for the project. Connection and site access works will still be required within the road reserves of Captain Gully Road and potentially its intersection with Clarke Lane.</p>																
Setbacks	<p>The previously approved layout includes minimum setbacks to address site constraints and environmental impacts, as listed in Section 3.1 of the previously approved Planning Report. These are listed below along with whether the minimum setbacks have been maintained in the proposed amended layout.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="411 1395 1425 1850"> <thead> <tr> <th>Renewable Energy Facility Component</th> <th>Distance to Nearest Neighbour Property Boundary (m)</th> <th>Distance to Nearest Road (m)</th> <th>Minimum setback achieved in amended layout?</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Inverters</td> <td>30m minimum</td> <td>10m</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Solar arrays</td> <td>30m or more</td> <td>10m plus road reserve</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Proposed construction set down area and site office</td> <td>50m</td> <td>50m (approx.)</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Other key setbacks in the previously approved layout and whether these have been maintained in the amended layout are listed below:</p>	Renewable Energy Facility Component	Distance to Nearest Neighbour Property Boundary (m)	Distance to Nearest Road (m)	Minimum setback achieved in amended layout?	Inverters	30m minimum	10m	Yes	Solar arrays	30m or more	10m plus road reserve	Yes	Proposed construction set down area and site office	50m	50m (approx.)	Yes
Renewable Energy Facility Component	Distance to Nearest Neighbour Property Boundary (m)	Distance to Nearest Road (m)	Minimum setback achieved in amended layout?														
Inverters	30m minimum	10m	Yes														
Solar arrays	30m or more	10m plus road reserve	Yes														
Proposed construction set down area and site office	50m	50m (approx.)	Yes														

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PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT		
	SETBACK	MAINTAINED	COMMENT
	Solar arrays setback minimum 10m from security fence.	Yes	The amended site plan continues to maintain a 10m setback from solar arrays to the security fence.
	Security fence setback 10m from Captains Gully Road to allow for landscaping if required.	No	<p>The security fence is now proposed along the property boundary for the majority of the facility’s western boundary, rather than 10m setback, as no landscaping is needed or requested along the western boundary of the facility.</p> <p>In the southwestern corner of the facility, the security fence is setback from the property boundary to avoid the Designated Waterway (see also section 3).</p>
	Security fence setback 30m from eastern property boundary to protect the former Byron Reef Quartz Mine.	Yes	This minimum setback has been maintained. The proposed security fence in the amended layout is now 140m from the eastern property boundary.
<p>This copied document to be made available for the sole purpose of enabling its consideration and review as part of a planning process under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The document must not be used for any purpose which may breach any copyright</p>	Minimum 6m wide north-south gap between solar array trackers.	No	<p>The amended layout has two back to back sets of trackers south of the key equipment area. There is no north-south gap between these trackers as it is not warranted nor a requirement.</p> <p>The CFA’s <i>Design Guidelines and Model Requirements, Renewable Energy Facilities (2022)</i> requires a minimum 6m separation between solar panel banks for non-Micro solar farms (>5MW solar farms). This requirement does not apply to Micro Solar Facilities such as this project, and furthermore, a bank of solar panels is defined as a group of panels connected to a single inverter. All panels in this ~3MW solar farm are connected to one inverter.</p>

PROJECT COMPONENT	PROPOSED AMENDMENT	
	In addition to the above setbacks, the below new setbacks have been incorporated into the amended layout:	
	SETBACK	COMMENT
	Buffer from identified scar tree	The Aboriginal Heritage Assessment identified an isolated paddock tree east of the site to be a scar tree. A buffer zone determined by the Aboriginal heritage consultant has been applied to protect the tree from impacts during construction and operation. The amended site layout avoids impacts to this buffer.
	Buffer from identified artefact scatter	The Aboriginal Heritage Assessment identified an artefact scatter east of the site. A buffer zone determined by the Aboriginal heritage consultant has been applied to protect the area from impacts during construction and operation. The amended site layout avoids impacts to this buffer.
	Setback from Designated Waterway	Refer to the Waterways section of Table 2.
Fencing	The alignment of the proposed security fence has been adjusted to suit the updated layout and setbacks discussed above. The height would be 1.8m of chainwire mesh plus 2-3 strands of barbed wire to meet Australian security fence standards.	

3. Environmental Assessment

The environmental impacts of the proposed changes have been assessed and considered against the impacts previously assessed and approved. The outcomes of this assessment is provided in Table 2 below.

The assessment demonstrates that the proposed changes do not result in additional impacts to those assessed and approved under the existing consent. In many cases, the impacts have reduced due to the reduction in project size.

Table 2 Environmental assessment

Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
Flora & Fauna	Decreased impacts	The project as previously approved permits the removal of four scattered native trees, with the requirement to offset this impact through securing 0.089 general habitat units meeting certain criteria.

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Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
		<p>Due to the reduction in project size and footprint, the disturbance area has significantly decreased, and now no trees require removal.</p> <p>Accordingly, this planning permit amendment seeks to remove the conditions relating to offsets and native vegetation removal which are no longer relevant (refer Section 3 and Appendix C).</p>
Noise	Compliance with noise limits maintained.	<p>An updated noise assessment has been prepared by Arup (2022) for the updated project layout and addition of the BESS. The assessment concludes that the project complies with the noise limits at all receivers.</p> <p>The updated noise assessment is provided in Appendix A.</p>
Historic heritage	Decreased potential impacts	<p>The disturbance footprint has reduced and has a greater separation distance (~100m) from overlay HO1074 (Byron Reef Quartz Mines, Pyrenees Highway) east of the site.</p> <p>Further, a heritage survey of the Byron Reef Quartz Mine site was undertaken in August 2021 to determine the location, extent and features of the site, to address condition 5 of the planning permit. The survey concluded that the area marked as HO1074, and the proposed disturbance area for the project do not contain any of the mining sites. A copy of the heritage survey is provided in Appendix B.</p>
Cultural heritage	-	<p>A mandatory Cultural Heritage Management (CHMP) Plan is triggered by the proposal. During the historic heritage survey of the Byron Reef Quartz Mine, an isolated paddock tree within the site area was incidentally identified to be a potential scarred tree. The tree was later confirmed to be a scarred tree by a suitably qualified consultant. A CHMP has been commissioned including an assessment of the whole project site. The CHMP is being prepared by Tech Duinn, and in consultation with the local indigenous group, the Dja Dja Wurrung.</p> <p>A complex assessment has been undertaken as part of the CHMP which identified an area containing artefacts. An appropriate exclusion zone/buffer has been determined around the scar tree and artefact area to ensure there would be no impacts to these heritage sites.</p> <p>The updated layout has avoided impacts to these exclusion zones.</p> <p>The CHMP is currently in draft form and will be finalised and provided to DELWP in the coming weeks.</p>
Traffic, access and car parking	Decreased impacts	<p>The proposed amendments do not result in any additional potential impacts on traffic and access. With the reduction in project size, the total number of vehicle movements during construction would decrease.</p> <p>The revised site access point on Captains Gully Road, which has shifted southward, does not impact on native vegetation.</p>

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Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
		<p>The proposed amendments do not change requirements for car parking. The project includes adequate space for onsite parking for O&M vehicles adjacent to the key equipment. It is typical for small unmanned solar farms not to have formal carparking spaces. The facility would be an unmanned facility, remotely monitored. The only vehicles accessing the site during operation are for ad hoc O&M activities. During O&M activities an average of 1-2 vehicles would be onsite at any one time.</p>
Visual and landscape	Decreased impacts	<p>Due to the reduction in project size and footprint, the visibility of the project has significantly decreased. The nearest dwelling to the northeast (245 Clarke Lane) would have seen a small portion of the project with its previously approved size and layout, however now would now have no visibility of the amended project. Other dwellings in the area will continue to be screened from the project through existing vegetation and topography.</p> <p>The conditions of the existing planning permit required landscaping to be planted along the eastern boundary to limit visual impacts of the solar farm from the nearest dwelling at 245 Clarke Lane. However, as this dwelling no longer has visibility to the amended project, landscaping is no longer warranted and therefore this planning permit amendment application seeks to remove conditions related to the landscaping (refer Appendix C).</p>
Geotechnical	None	<p>The proposed amendments do not result in any change to the suitability of the geotechnical conditions onsite.</p>
Agricultural	Decreased impacts	<p>The decrease in project size and footprint retains more land for continued agricultural use at current capacities.</p>
Electro-magnetic Interference	None	<p>The proposed amendments do not result in any change to conclusions regarding electromagnetic interference as assessed previously.</p>
Aviation and Glint and Glare	Decreased potential impacts	<p>Due to the reduction in project size and footprint, the proposed amendments result in a decreased potential for glint and glare to aircraft from that assessed previously.</p>
Fire	<p>Decreased potential impacts from the solar farm.</p> <p>Increased potential impacts due to the</p>	<p>Since the previous planning permit was granted, the CFA has released two further versions of their guidelines for renewable energy installations. The latest guideline document is <i>Design Guidelines and Model Requirements, Renewable Energy Facilities</i> (2022). This guideline includes provisions for 'Micro Solar Facilities' (5MW or under) in recognition of the lower risk that they pose compared to larger solar facilities. The amended project is a ~3MW solar farm and therefore the requirements relating to Micro Solar Facilities in the 2022 guidelines should be applied.</p>

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Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
	addition of a BESS.	<p>The 2022 guideline also includes more detailed requirements for battery installations. The proposed battery is a ‘Large-scale battery system’ under the guidelines as it is more than 1MW. As such, requirements for Large-scale batteries are assumed to apply to the proposed BESS.</p> <p>Summarised below are the key amendments to the project as they relate to the new CFA guidelines. This planning permit application seeks to amend the conditions to reflect the new guidelines accordingly (refer Appendix C).</p> <p><u>Perimeter road:</u></p> <p>In accordance with part 6.2.1, Micro Solar Facilities without battery energy systems do not require perimeter roads. In April 2022 during a meeting with the CFA about this project, the CFA clarified that Micro Solar Facilities with batteries require a perimeter road only around the BESS, not the entire solar farm facility. As such the revised layout includes a perimeter road around the BESS and PCS area. There is no perimeter road proposed around the whole facility since it is not a requirement, nor warranted.</p> <p><u>Fire Break:</u></p> <p>In accordance with part 6.2.4 a fire break with minimum width of 10m is required around the perimeter of the whole facility. A 10m fire break is also required around the battery energy storage system. The revised layout includes both of these fire breaks.</p> <p><u>Water tank capacity</u></p> <p>Under part 6.2, where there is no reticulated water available (such as this site) battery energy storage systems require a fire water supply in a static storage tank with no less than 288kL capacity. This size tank has been included in the updated layout.</p> <p>It is not proposed to connect the tank to a hydrant system on site, as the tank is located at a sufficient distance to the BESS and PCS, whereby the fire fighting vehicles can connect direct to the tank and the water stream would reach the BESS area. Recent consultation with the CFA in April 2022 has indicated that this is acceptable and the CFA will review this in further detail through their review of management plans post-consent.</p> <p><u>Site access points:</u></p> <p>In addition to the main site entrance on Captains Gully Road, the proposed amended layout nominates an indicative location for a secondary access point on the eastern boundary for emergency only use. There would not be a formal road to this gate however fire trucks could access this point via the surrounding paddocks. During a meeting with the CFA in April 2022, the CFA indicated that this would satisfactorily address</p>

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Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
		<p>their requirement for provision of at least two access points to the facility (part 6.2.1(h)).</p> <p><u>Landscaping:</u></p> <p>This planning permit seeks to remove CFA conditions relating to landscaping, as landscaping is no longer required to screen the project as it is no longer visible to the dwelling to the northeast (refer comments on visual and landscape above).</p> <p><u>Dangerous Goods:</u></p> <p>Four battery units are proposed weighing approximately 26,000 kg each (total of 104,000 kg). This exceeds the Class 9, 20,000 kg fire protection quantity threshold under the Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2012 that applies to lithium-ion batteries. The application will require referral to The Victorian WorkCover Authority as a determining referral authority under Clause 66.02-7 of the planning scheme.</p> <p>How the project addresses other CFA requirements, such as BESS impact protection and fire water containment, will be developed through the preparation of the following management plans required by CFA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk Management Plan - Fire Management Plan - Emergency Management Plan. <p>CFA confirmed during a meeting in April 2022 that they would accept these plans being developed post-consent.</p>
Flood		<p>The proposed amendments do not result in any change to conclusions regarding flooding as assessed previously. The reduced project footprint is entirely within the previously assessed site.</p>
Waterways	-	<p>The existing planning permit includes the following conditions relating to waterways:</p> <p><i>12. All buildings, solar panels and works (excluding any approved access crossings and associated cabling) must be setback a minimum of 30 metres from the top of bank of the designated waterway which traverses the southern portion of the project area.</i></p> <p><i>13. Any fencing within 10 metres of the designated waterway must be of an open style construction up to 0.5 metres above natural ground level to allow the passage of flood waters through the site. Prior to the commencement of works, plans of the proposed fencing style must be submitted to the North Central CMA for approval.</i></p> <p><i>14. Prior to the commencement of works, appropriate silt control measures must be installed to prevent sediment laden runoff from leaving the construction site, laydown areas, and access tracks and entering waterways. The silt control measures must be maintained throughout the construction period.</i></p>

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Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
		<p>The designated waterway referred to in the above conditions has been surveyed and mapped in the revised plans provided with this amendment application (F100, F101).</p> <p>As illustrated in the plans, the waterway has a defined bank and channel along its east to west flow path south of the site. From here, the waterway continues in a northwest direction through a very shallow depression to a culvert in Captains Gully Road. This section of the waterway does not have a bank or defined channel.</p> <p>The revised site layout is set back 30m from the top of the bank, from the section of the waterway where there is a bank, to respond to the required setback in condition 12 of the existing planning permit.</p> <p>The revised site layout is set back 10m from the section of the waterway where there is no bank or channel but only a slight depression. For this section of the waterway, the centreline of the depression is used to measure the setback from, as per advice from the North Central Catchment Management Authority.</p> <p>The project proposes to only apply a 10m setback from the section of waterway without a defined bank or channel, rather than 30m, because the works would have a negligible impact to the waterway. The only project components within 30m of this section of the waterway include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chainwire mesh security fence (open style allowing water to flow through) - 10m wide fire break (comprising crushed gravel or bare/non-vegetated ground and no structures). - Approximately 5-10 piles to support a small area of the solar arrays. <p>The above project elements would have a negligible impact on water flows as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the surface level of the ground would not be altered.
<p>This copied document to be made available for the sole purpose of enabling its consideration and review as part of a planning process under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The document must not be used for any purpose which may breach any copyright</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - obstructions in the area include only the fence and solar array piles, and chainwire mesh, which have a very small footprint and therefore would not obstruct flow paths - the area would remain pervious. <p>In light of the above, a 10m setback is considered sufficient to avoid impacts to the designated waterway.</p> <p>Applying a 30m setback instead would prevent a portion of trackers from being installed, significant reducing the output of the solar farm.</p>
<p>Cumulative Impacts</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The proposed amendments do not result in any change to conclusions regarding cumulative impacts as assessed previously.</p>

Environmental aspect	Change to impacts to those previously assessed/ approved.	Comment
Other	-	Due to the reduction in project size and footprint, the proposed electrical infrastructure is now 270m from the high pressure gas main located outside of the solar farm site to the south. Further, the gas pipeline and solar farm no longer share a common land parcel. As such, this planning permit seeks to remove the conditions of the planning permit related to gas pipelines as these are considered no longer relevant.

4. Proposed changes to Planning Permit Conditions

In light of the proposed amendments, a number of conditions of the planning permit are proposed to be removed or amended accordingly. These condition amendments relate to the following:

- Landscaping no longer warranted/proposed
- Updated site layout no longer adjacent to gas pipeline
- Updated site layout no longer impacting native vegetation
- Updated CFA *Design Guidelines and Model Requirements, Renewable Energy Facilities* (2022).

The proposed amendments to the conditions are provided as a mark-up in Appendix C.

It is requested that conditions relating to fire management be kept high level and point to the development of management plans and consultation with the CFA, as we note the CFA may accept amendments to their Model Requirements during further consultation and their review of the management plans post-consent.

Additionally, Appendix B closes out condition 5 of the existing planning permit and could be removed, subject to DEWLP’s acceptance.

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Appendices

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Appendix A – Updated Noise Assessment

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Appendix B – Historic Heritage Survey of Byron Reef Mines

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Appendix C – Proposed Amendments to Conditions

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