



Community drop-in sessions

In March this year, we held two community drop-in information sessions at the Milawa Hall to share draft concept designs and hear from the local community.



2 drop-in sessions



Around 100 attendees



115 feedback forms



31 new registrations to e-news

Feedback forms were completed at the sessions and shared with project staff. Forms were also submitted to the project email address after the session. Thank you to those who took the time to attend the sessions and complete a feedback form.

Feedback is an important part of project development. From here, we'll work with our planning and design teams to consider feedback received to inform the final concept design and planning application.

WHAT WE HEARD

The main themes raised during the sessions were:

- Impacts to agricultural land in the region
- Concerns around bushfire risk and how this will be managed
- Potential impacts to native vegetation
- Potential effects on flood-prone waterways and catchments in the area
- How insurance arrangements will be managed

A number of questions about the project scope and planning process were also asked during the sessions. We've provided a response to these below.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PROJECT?

Over the next few months we'll continue to refine the project design, following community and stakeholder feedback and outcomes of our technical assessments to date. We'll also continue to prepare detailed technical assessments.

These assessments will form part of the project's Planning Application and be submitted to the Minister for Planning for assessment via the Department of Transport and Planning.

We expect to submit the Planning Application to the Department later this year.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is developing the project?

Meadow Creek Solar Farm is being developed by Meadow Creek Solar Farm Pty Ltd, who has engaged renewable energy specialists (DNV) and environmental and planning specialists to assist with the design and planning processes.

Where is the project?

The Meadow Creek Solar Farm is located in North East Victoria, around 27km south-east of Wangaratta. The site could host up to 330MW of solar energy, and if developed to its full capacity could power around 110,000 homes. The site is nearby to Meadow Creek, Milawa, Bobinawarrah, Oxley, Docker and Moyhu. According to 2021 census data, this area has a population of around 2,050 residents.

Why has this location been chosen?

For projects to be successful, they need to be located near areas with available transmission network and capacity. The site is closely located to the Dederang to Glenrowan Transmission line. We've determined through early grid assessments there would be capacity in this transmission line to support the project. Energy projects need to be located all around the network to reduce bottle necks in the grid.

How long will the solar farm operate for and what will decommissioning the site involve?

The solar farm would have an operational life of around 30 years. As the project nears its project end life, a decommissioning strategy will be prepared. Decommissioning the site would involve removing all infrastructure from the site, including any in ground structures or footings and rehabilitating the land back to its original use.

How will fire risk be managed?

The solar farm and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will be designed to the highest standards for fire safety. The CFA has strict design guidelines for proponents to incorporate into design. Some measures include the requirement of cleared vegetation zones, fire breaks between panel arrays, and strict vegetation management plans.

Like all electrical equipment, batteries and solar equipment require careful design and management to ensure fire risk is managed and controlled.

What battery technology is being used?

BESS are becoming more common on renewable energy projects to help secure energy supply and provide grid stability services. The Meadow Creek Solar Farm proposal includes a 250MW 2-hr BESS. We are currently working with EnergyVault, an energy storage specialist, to progress detailed grid protection studies that are required by the market operator.

What does the planning process involve?

To obtain a planning permit for a Renewable Energy Facility in Victoria, a proponent must prepare a Planning Application that responds to the relevant requirements of the local Planning Scheme, including the relevant planning controls (zones and overlays). A Planning Application for a Renewable Energy Facility must also address the application requirements listed under Clause 53.13 of the Planning Scheme.

A proponent (Meadow Creek Solar Farm Pty Ltd) will lodge an application with the Minister for Planning who is the responsible authority for Renewable Energy Facility development, via the Department of Transport and Planning.

The Planning Application is then put on public display (notice) for community and stakeholders to have their say on the proposal, by making a submission.

How will you consider impacts to agricultural land in the region?

A detailed Agricultural Land Use assessment will be prepared as part of the Planning Application. Under the Planning Scheme, a renewable energy facility is an allowable use within the Farming Zone, subjected to a Planning Permit. You can read more about this topic, including how the assessment is prepared in our Agricultural Land Use factsheet.

What will the ecology assessment include?

We're preparing a detailed ecology assessment. The ecology assessment will map flora and fauna found at the site, including the potential presence of protected species. The assessment will also map native trees and vegetation found at the site, including trees that may need to be removed and propose methods to avoid or minimise impacts on ecology. The final number of trees to be removed is still to be determined as we refine the concept design.

What roads will be used to access the site during construction and operations?

A detailed Traffic and Transport Assessment will be prepared to identify the best transport routes to be used during construction. This will consider existing road conditions and any modifications or improvement works that might be needed to support increased traffic or large equipment deliveries during construction.

How will you manage biosecurity on the site?

As part of the Planning Application, we'll prepare a detailed Environmental Management Plan which will include measures to monitor and manage biosecurity. Biosecurity control measures are likely to include, at a minimum:

- Awareness and training for staff
- Regular identification and review of hazards
- Vehicle, boots and equipment inspections and washing before entering and leaving the site.

What are the benefits for the community?

Introduction of more renewable energy is good for communities in the long term to reduce power prices and ensure a secure energy supply.

In line with industry best practice, Meadow Creek Solar Farm is developing a Benefit Sharing Program to contribute positively to the region. This will include an annual community benefit fund of \$100,000 to support local projects and initiatives. We are keen to hear from the community and other stakeholders on what they would like to see delivered in the region.

During construction there will be a large team working on site. A small team of full-time employees will be needed to operate and manage the site. There will also be opportunities to work with local suppliers and business during construction and operations.

How are you managing insurance arrangements with project neighbours?

The Meadow Creek Solar Farm will have a range of insurance policies in place to cover the site in the event of damage or fire.