



Agricultural land use

Meadow Creek Solar Farm is a proposed renewable energy development located around 27km south-east of Wangaratta. At around 566 hectares, the site could host up to 330MW of solar energy – powering around 110,000 homes.

Before the project is built, we'll complete technical assessments to understand the potential impacts of the project. Technical assessments will cover a range of topics including Agricultural land use.

This assessment will consider the potential impacts of the project on Agricultural land use in the region. The report will include a summary of:

- Soil types and uses
- Agricultural productivity of the site
- Cumulative effects of solar facilities
- Assessment of the site in relation to irrigation districts.

ECONOMIC VALUE TO THE REGION

Agriculture is an important contributor to the economy in Wangaratta and represents over \$168 million in

economic value to the region. Agriculture in Wangaratta consists of cattle, sheep, viticulture, crops, berries and some fruit, covering around 127,000 hectares of land.



The Victorian Renewable Energy Targets plan for 50% of our electricity to come from renewable sources by 2030.



EXISTING USE AT THE SITE

The site is currently used for beef production, with a breeding herd of around 450. The site is situated on an Alluvial plain (ALP2), which is known to be flat with poor drainage and predominantly suited to grazing and cropping.

The site is located within the Farming Zone. Under the provisions of the Farming Zone, a renewable energy facility is an allowable use subject to planning approval.

The site is not within a Victorian Irrigation District and has no connection to modernised irrigation infrastructure.





STRATEGIC AGRICULTURAL LAND

Agricultural land can be considered high-value and strategically important for a range of features, including presence of high-quality soils, good rainfall, access to water through irrigation, resilience to climate change and infrastructure investment and integration with industry.

The Victorian Government Solar Energy Facilities Design and Development Guidelines (October 2022), note key considerations of assessing impact on strategic agricultural land include:

- the impact on the loss of the site if it has high quality soils, particularly soils that are niche to a type of crop or other agricultural activity
- the potential loss of reliable, accessible water, such as irrigated areas
- the impact of fragmentation and a change of land use to non-agriculture activity on local and regional productivity
- the impact of a change of land use on recent and/or current efforts to modernise and reform agricultural activity
- whether the land has specifically been set aside or defined for agricultural use and development in a planning scheme or other strategic document
- whether the change in land use is to the detriment of a government's previous or existing investment and support for the site or the area
- whether the proposed solar energy facility can co-locate with other agricultural activity, to help diversify farm income without reducing productivity.

The Agricultural Land Use assessment will consider the above and form part of the Planning Application. The Agricultural Land Use assessment will be available to view when the Planning Application is on public exhibition later this year.

PLANNING FOR AGRISOLAR

Meadow Creek Solar Farm is committed to maintaining the site as an 'Agrisolar' facility to manage grass and weed growth on the property and continue agricultural activities on the site. The planning application will include an Agri-solar plan, which will detail how Agrisolar could work on the site.

WHAT IS AGRISOLAR?

Agrisolar refers to co-developing the same area of land for both solar PV power as well as for agriculture. Several forms of agrisolar have been developed around the world, with a wide range of innovative approaches.

Agrisolar involves continuing grazing activities on the site to maximise the productive use of agricultural land. Grazing also helps to keep growth low and minimises the need for other forms of weed and grass management.

HOW WOULD AGRISOLAR WORK AT MEADOW CREEK SOLAR FARM?

Sheep grazing is considered the most suitable agricultural enterprise to implement at Meadow Creek Solar Farm as it is an existing agricultural activity in the region, and sheep are less likely to cause damage to solar infrastructure.

We're speaking to locals to understand ground conditions and how grazing could work. We've received feedback that heavy rainfall could limit grazing during wetter months.

It will be important to set up the site to allow a grazing rotation to be implemented, particularly through the wetter months, and further refinement of the most practical grazing blocks will be required.