THE COOBA SOLAR PROJECT

FAQ'S

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ABOUT THE PROJECT DEVELOPER

Who is the Cooba Solar Project developer?

Venn Energy Pty Ltd (Venn Energy) is an Australian renewable energy development company, founded by Canadian developer Venn Energy Inc., and Aira Group, an owner operator of renewable energy systems in Europe.

For further information visit:
www.vennenergy.com.au

What experience does Venn Energy have in Australia?

The Banksia Solar Project in QLD was the company's first development asset in Australia. The project was started in June 2019 and received development approval from the Bundaberg Regional Council in January 2021 and connection agreement in July 2023. It is expected to begin construction in 2024.

Venn Energy acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present, and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

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What is a large-scale solar farm?

Solar farms consist of a series of photovoltaic panels arranged in a 'solar array'. These panels convert sunlight to electricity, with the generated direct current (DC) moving through cables to inverters. Inverters convert (DC) to usable alternating current (AC), which flows into an existing high-voltage transmission line that runs through the site.

The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will provide reliable and efficient energy by stabilising the grid and shifting the supply of electricity from times of high supply and low demand to times of low supply and high demand.

Where is the subject site?

The site for the Cooba Solar Project is 124 Cornella Church Road and Plain Road, Colbinabbin, located approximately 40 kilometres east of Bendigo and 4 kilometres south of Colbinabbin in central Victoria (see Figure 1). The site is located within the Campaspe local government area. The wider site is approximately 1147 hectares of mostly cleared farmland, with solar farm infrastructure occupying 665 hectares of the site. The land is owned by a single landowner and, has been secured through an option to lease. Once the project is approved it is expected to be operational from 2027 with a 30-year project life.

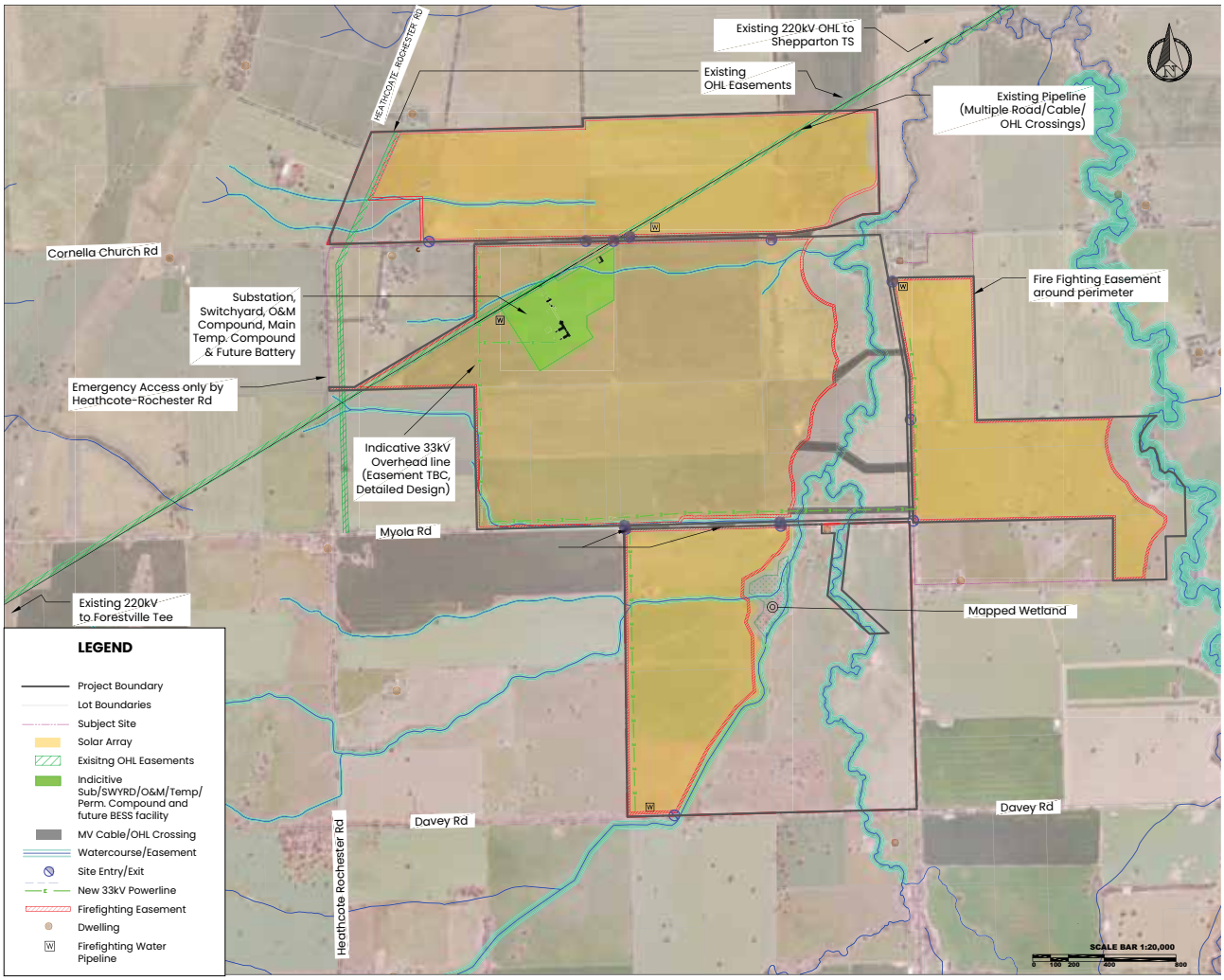

Figure 1 Context plan of the project

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Why has this location been chosen?

The greatest challenge for selecting where to develop new solar farms is identifying areas within the electricity grid with available capacity to connect. Once an area of the grid has been identified with capacity, planning experts assess the viability of the area based on various opportunities and constraints such as ecology, transport arrangements, landscape value, cultural heritage significance, agricultural land value, hazards, amenity impacts, etc.

Venn Energy has chosen the proposed site as an ideal place for a solar farm for the following reasons:

- The site is in an area of excellent solar exposure.
- The site is near an existing transmission line, allowing for easy connectivity to the grid.
- The site has already been largely cleared of native vegetation and heavily disturbed by previous cultivation and cropping.
- The proposed layout allows for the minimal disturbance of native vegetation and wildlife.

What is proposed for the Cooba Solar Project?

The proposed solar farm has a capacity of up to 350-megawatt (MW) AC/500MW DC solar energy facility and 300MW battery energy storage system (BESS). The latest technology in solar photovoltaic (PV) panels are proposed. These panels are mounted on a single axis tracker that changes orientation throughout the day to follow the sun and maximise energy captured. This project has the potential to generate enough clean renewable energy to:

- Power 180,000 Victorian homes.
- Avoid the generation of 733,333 tonnes per year of carbon dioxide (CO2).
- Remove the equivalent of 159,429 vehicles off the road per year .
- Remove the equivalent of 303,030 tonnes per year of coal burned.

For the latest updates and current information, visit www.coobasolarproject.com.au

NEIGHBOUR & COMMUNITY BENEFIT SHARING

How will the economic benefits of the project be shared with the Colbinabbin community?

Venn Energy are committed to ensuring the economic benefits of the project are shared with the wider Colbinabbin community in a meaningful and lasting way.

In this respect, Venn Energy is committed to establishing a community benefit sharing fund with annual funding from the Cooba Solar Project of $200,000 per year, throughout the operational life of the project.

This program will be designed to evolve with the community over time, in order to deliver positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

The structure and governance of the community benefit fund will be developed through cooperation and consultation with the local community. It is intended that the fund will be established and administered by a community-led committee with direct input into the allocation of funds across the various priority initiatives, programs, and projects throughout the community.

The initial guiding principles of the fund are:

Empowerment – such that the Colbinabbin community may be empowered with the resources, support, and authority to address the issues of greatest importance and direct local benefit.

Resilience – funding initiatives that build resilience within the community and its environment.

Alignment – ensuring funding is mutually beneficial, aligned with existing programs and initiatives in the community, and in collaboration with Council, local institutions, and authorities.

Funding may include initiatives that support health and wellbeing, local skills development and training, education, population growth and retention, economic development, and sustainability of the natural environment, among others.

Venn Energy's intention is that the community benefit fund will support and further strengthen the positive legacy of the Colbinabbin community.

As we advance consultation with the community for establishing the community benefit sharing fund, we encourage any individuals with interest in participating in a community reference group to contact us via our website, email, or by phone.

What are the community benefits of a solar farm such as Cooba?

Solar farms, such as the proposed Cooba Solar Project, can have several direct and in-direct economic benefits for a local community including:

- Local employment opportunities for up to 250 employees and contractors during the construction phase, and up to 6 permanent positions for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the site, with further contractor opportunities available.
- Procurement of goods and services from local businesses for accommodation, meals, machinery contractors, construction trades, surveyors, cleaning services, security services, training service providers, building supplies, and waste contractors.
- A Community benefit sharing program to provide the resources and empowerment to the local community to fund various priority initiatives and projects throughout the life of the project.
- Reducing the cost of electricity for consumers in comparison to traditional fossil fuel-based energy sources.

Will the neighbours of the project directly benefit?

Venn Energy is committed to ensuring the immediate neighbours of the Cooba Solar Project share directly in the economic benefits of the project. Venn Energy are proposing an industry-leading neighbour benefit sharing program for the project in the form of an annual subsidy to each neighbour with a habitable dwelling within 1km of the project site. These annual neighbour benefit subsidies will be paid to the owner(s) of each property annually, throughout the operational life of the project. The criteria used for sizing each subsidy is based on the proximity of neighbours to the proposed project area, and view of the project site. Additional non-financial benefits may be offered to neighbours as part of the program, including on-site landscaping or tree planting.

Venn Energy has been in communication with neighbours of the proposed project prior to lodgement of the planning application and will continue to be in close communication throughout the planning process.

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ASSESSMENT & APPLICATION PROCESS

What stage is the project at?

The project is currently in the planning stage, with detailed assessments and design currently being undertaken. It is intended that a planning permit application will be lodged with the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), on behalf of the Minister for Planning, by September 2023.

What is the planning permit process?

- Once a planning permit application has been lodged with DTP, they will undertake a review of the submitted materials to ensure all required information has been provided, before referring the application to relevant referral authorities for their comments.
- Statutory notice of the application will be given when all required information has been provided.
- The usual notice requirement is via a letter to the owners and occupiers of land within at least 1km of the project. A notice may also be published in a local newspaper as well as a sign or signs erected at the site.
- The notice period is typically between 2 and 4 weeks. However, submissions can be made to DTP up until the time that a decision is made on the application.
- Once the notice period is complete, DTP officers can undertake their detailed assessment of the application.
- A decision on an application is usually made within 6-8 months of lodgement.

More detailed information on the planning permit process can be found in the Victorian State Government's Using Victoria's Planning System October 2022 publication.

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Venn Energy is committed to sharing the economic benefits with the Colbinnabin community and the neighbours of the project.

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How are noise impacts assessed?

The Victorian Government's Solar Energy Facilities: Design and Development Guideline (October 2022) states that a project should manage noise impacts in accordance with the Environmental Protection regulations under the Environmental Protection Act 2017. Venn Energy have commissioned a Noise Impact Assessment to understand the project's noise impacts. The assessment has found that operational noise levels are predicted to comply with noise limits and the project will continue to do so throughout the operational phase.

How are visual impacts assessed?

The visual impact assessment for the project has been conducted by a suitably qualified and experienced team, in accordance with best practice.

When evaluating the visual impact of the project, the following factors at each Key Observation Point are assessed:

Visual Character Units

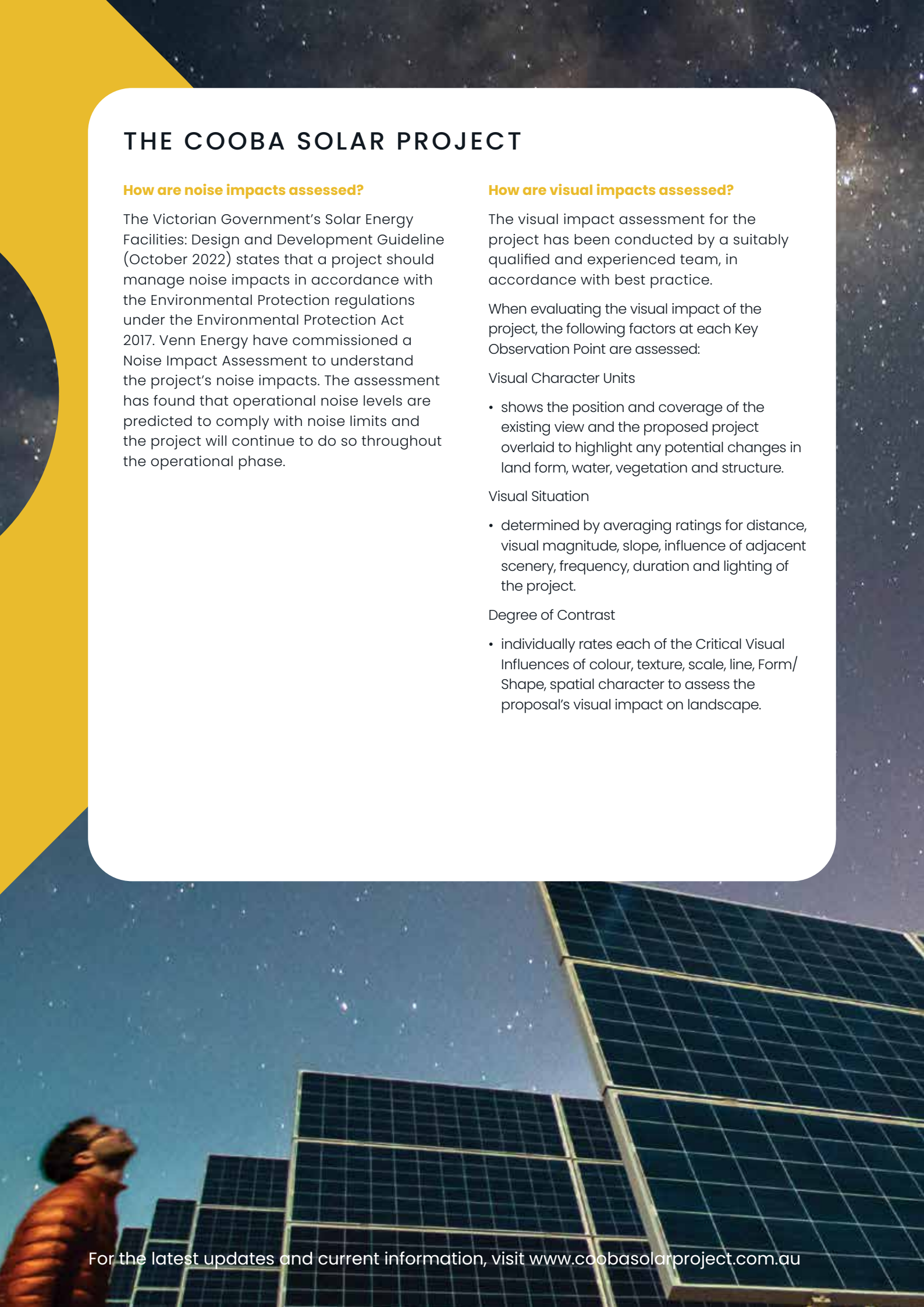
- shows the position and coverage of the existing view and the proposed project overlaid to highlight any potential changes in land form, water, vegetation and structure.

Visual Situation

- determined by averaging ratings for distance, visual magnitude, slope, influence of adjacent scenery, frequency, duration and lighting of the project.

Degree of Contrast

- individually rates each of the Critical Visual Influences of colour, texture, scale, line, Form/ Shape, spatial character to assess the proposal's visual impact on landscape.



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CONSTRUCTION OF THE SOLAR FARM

When will construction take place?

- Construction is proposed to commence in late 2024, if the planning and grid connection approvals are received, negotiation of a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) is finalised, and the financial close process is completed.
- Construction would take approximately 12-18 months.
- Any works will occur within normal working hours (weekdays from 7AM to 6PM and Saturday 7am to 1pm, with no work on Sundays or public holidays)
- Should works need to be done outside of these times, Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria guidelines will be followed.

During construction, the following measures will be ensured to minimise dust generation:

- Avoid or minimise ground disturbance, soil movement and other dust producing activities.
- Utilise water or wetting agent on any exposed areas, including unpaved roads and lay down areas.
- Utilise wind breaks and silt fencing.
- Conduct flexible management of speed limits in accordance with road and wind conditions.
- The preparation of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would be a condition of any planning permit that may be issued, and would include measures to manage construction activities and potential impacts.

How will traffic and road access be managed during construction?

- Site Access locations have been proposed along Cornella-Church Road, Myola Road, Plain Road and Davey Road with access to these locations afforded from Heathcote-Rochester Road.
- A total of up to 200 (two way) additional daily vehicle movements are expected during the peak construction activities.
- An agreement will be implemented, with the local Council, to guide construction standards and maintenance during the construction period.
- Venn Energy and their project manager will ensure that requirements are closely followed, and that any construction is considerate of road users, stakeholders, and the community.
- A detailed Traffic Management Plan (TMP) will be prepared once the project design is complete and prior to commencement of the project construction. The TMP will outline various traffic requirements to mitigate and manage the construction period.

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OPERATION OF THE SOLAR FARM

Will existing agricultural activities continue at the project site?
Yes. It is proposed that panel arrays will be spaced 8 - 10 metres apart, providing adequate space for the land to be used for agricultural purposes, such as sheep grazing. Livestock grazing has become a widespread practice in conjunction with renewable energy developments; this practice is known as agrophotovoltaics. Not only do livestock thrive but they also assist in maintenance of the project site, keeping vegetation low and assisting with weed management.

How will bushfire risk be managed?
The project will follow the guidance and direction provided by the Country Fire Authority's Design Guidelines and Model Requirements which include: Renewable Energy Facilities, including fire risk management, facility design and location, construction and commissioning, operation, fire management planning, emergency management planning, and bushfire emergency planning. All cables and materials to be used will be fire and heat resistant and fire breaks will be established around the perimeter of the project and surrounding boundaries. Monitoring and alarm systems built at the site will also alert if any high heat is detected in any components of the solar arrays and BESS.

Will the project impact the value of my property?
Many studies have been undertaken across Australia and internationally regarding the impact of solar farms and other renewable energy projects on the value of surrounding properties. The consensus is that solar farms are not known to impact surrounding property values positively or negatively.

Venn Energy acknowledges that the primary asset for most families is their home and property. The visual impact of the project will be managed through vegetative screening, where possible, in consultation with those neighbours.

Is a Cultural Heritage study being undertaken?
Yes. The project has undertaken a Standard Assessment and testing is underway to complete the Complex Assessment phase. Upon completion of the Complex Assessment stage a Cultural Heritage Management Plan will be completed and submitted for approval to the Registered Aboriginal Party. The Cultural Heritage Management Plan will assess the potential impact of the project on any sites of cultural significance and provide a detailed management plan should any cultural artefacts be identified during construction.

Will neighbouring livestock and crops be impacted by any 'heat island' effects?
Large-scale solar farms and their effects on temperature have been the subject of numerous national and international research investigations. Studies have concluded that the heat island effect does not apply outside the solar project's perimeter.

Several studies have demonstrated that there are only slight increases in air temperature at solar PV farm sites, and that these temperature rises are confined to the immediate area, especially above the solar PV arrays with warm air rising due to natural convection. The studies show that temperatures match surrounding ambient levels only a short distance (30m) from the boundary of the PV site.

These setbacks have been taken into account in the proposed design of the Cooba Solar Project.

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CONTACT US

Feedback & Contact Details for the project

We value feedback from residents and wider Colbinabbin community members and we always welcome the opportunity to discuss queries you may have about the project.

Local suppliers and contractors are encouraged to register their interest and capabilities with us via our website.

Please feel free to reach out to us by:

Email: info@coobasolarproject.com.au

Phone: 0485 835 404

Website: coobasolarproject.com.au

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