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Sutton solar farm approved by NSW government despite resident, Yass Valley Council anger



• **Andrew Brown**

Local News



Dianne and Mark Burgess and other Sutton residents say the site of a proposed solar farm is not the right one. Picture: Sitthixay Ditthavong

A solar farm as big as entire Canberra suburbs, proposed to be built just kilometres from the ACT/NSW border despite protests from the local council and residents, has been approved by the NSW government.

The \$120 million [Springdale Solar Farm](#), earmarked for a 185-hectare site north-west of Sutton, was given the green light by the state government's Independent Planning Commission, following a three-year approval process. Oxley is 108 hectares and Aranda 160 hectares, by comparison.

Planning documents have revealed the solar farm would include as many as 260,000 solar panels up to four metres high, and would generate as much as 100 megawatts.

While a start date for construction had yet to be finalised, those behind the development have said work could begin as early as 2022.

However, multiple Sutton residents, along with representatives of Yass Valley Council, have hit out against the proposal.

Residents have said construction for the solar farm would bring dozens of trucks through the town on a daily basis which the infrastructure in Sutton would not be able to handle, as well as being a visual eyesore for neighbours.

Sutton residents have said while they're not opposed to solar power or renewable energy, the development had been earmarked for the wrong location.

Yass Valley Council said major issues brought up during the consultation process were ignored by planners.



Concerned residents gather at the site of a proposed solar farm in Sutton. Picture: Richard Thompson

The project was first flagged in 2018 by developer Renew Estate, but was soon taken over by fellow developer RES in 2020.

The NSW planning commission said the project would contribute to the national electricity market, producing enough power for 37,000 homes. As part of the conditions for approval, vegetation screening would need to be implemented.

A 60-hectare conservation area would also need to be established to protect the habitat of the endangered golden sun moth, superb parrot and the legless lizard.

"The commission finds that on balance ... the impacts are acceptable and capable of being appropriately mitigated through the measures required under the conditions of consent imposed by the commission," the approval statement said. "The commission is of the view that the project is in the public interest."

But residents in the community have hit out against the proposal, saying construction from the project would negatively impact on Sutton and was set for the wrong location.

Sutton resident Mark Burgess said more than 70 trucks per day would be going through narrow streets and dirt roads ill-equipped to handle it, as well as being a visual impact.

"The bigger issues is the traffic and the fact there'll be 75 trucks a day going through those roads and they can't get through Sutton and over the small causeway without crossing unbroken lines, which is a significant safety risk for users," he said.

"Because of the elevation of some properties, it's going to be impossible for some people to screen it out, but there is also a great deal of concern around the biodiversity that would be impacted as well."

The site of the development is near biodiversity corridors for endangered species that run into the nearby Mulligans Flat nature reserve in the ACT.

Fellow resident Jacqui Hassell's property is just 300 metres from the development site. She said news of the development approval was devastating.

Yass Valley Council general manager Chris Berry said the council was against the development.

However, he said proposals put forward by the council to mitigate the concerns of council and residents were ignored by the commission.

"We thought it was in the wrong location, due to its proximity with the Canberra border and the land being used as a biodiversity corridor," he said.

"A lot of residents were concerned about the increase in traffic along Sutton Road through the village, and we made a representation for the project that there should be a bypass of the village. The commission and the Department of Planning didn't agree with that and didn't believe there was sufficient traffic for a bypass, even though it was a contentious issue for residents."

RES's development project manager Steve Reid said concerns from residents were taken into account.

"We did assess other routes [for trucks] into the site from the Federal Highway and we landed on the route through Sutton as the safest route," he said.

"There is still an EPBC approval to be obtained and we're working with the federal environment department for approval and that is ongoing. In terms of work surrounding [possible Indigenous heritage on the site] that is still outstanding, and that has to be completed before construction."