

# Notice of decision

## Section 2.22 and clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

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|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>Application type</b>                    | State Significant Development           |
| <b>Application number and project name</b> | SSD-66542218<br>Whitehaven Solar Farm   |
| <b>Applicant</b>                           | Whitehaven Energy Pty Ltd               |
| <b>Consent Authority</b>                   | Minister for Planning and Public Spaces |

### Decision

On 21 September 2026, the Executive Director, Energy, Resource and Industry Assessments, granted consent to the development application for the Whitehaven Solar Farm subject to conditions, under delegation from the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and section 4.38 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act).

A copy of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's assessment report and development consent is available [here](#).

### Date of decision

21 September 2026

### Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:

- the relevant matters listed in section 4.15 of the Act and the additional matters listed in the statutory context section of the Department's Assessment Report;
- the prescribed matters under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021*;
- the objects of the Act;
- the considerations under s 7.14(2) and 7.16(3) of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (NSW);
- all information submitted to the Department during the assessment of the development application and any additional information considered in the Department's Assessment Report;
- the findings and recommendations in the Department's Assessment Report; and
- the views of the community about the project (see **Attachment 1**).

The findings and recommendations set out in the Department's Assessment Report were accepted and adopted as the reasons for making this decision.

The key reasons for granting the development application are as follows:

- the project would provide a range of benefits for the region and the State as a whole, including:
  - providing behind renewable energy power to the Narrabri Mine;
  - contributing to a more diverse local economy;
  - creating up to 65 construction jobs;
  - contributions to Narrabri Shire Regional Council through a Voluntary Planning Agreement, including a lump sum of \$50,000;
  - a capital investment of approximately \$56.6 million; and
  - assisting in transitioning the electricity sector from coal and gas fired power stations to renewable energy.
- the project is permissible with consent, and is consistent with NSW Government policies including the *NSW Climate Change Policy Framework (2016)*, *NSW Electricity Strategy (2019)*, *NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap*, *NSW Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020 – 2030* and associated *Implementation Update* and *New England North West Regional Plan 2041*;
- the impacts on the community and the environment can be appropriately minimised and managed to an acceptable level, in accordance with applicable NSW Government policies and standards;
- none of the NSW Government agencies nor Council object to the project;
- the issues raised by the community during consultation and in submissions have been considered and adequately addressed through changes to the project and the conditions of consent. Engagement on the project is considered to be in line with *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects*, including the community participation objectives outlined in these guidelines; and
- weighing all relevant considerations, the project is in the public interest, subject to the strict conditions of the consent.

## Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

The Department exhibited the Environmental Impact Statement for the project from 13 February 2025 to 13 March 2025 and received 57 unique submissions from the public (including ten from interest groups), of which 57 objected to the project.

The Applicant engaged with the community during the preparation of the EIS and detailed the findings of the engagement, including how it influenced the scope and design of the project, in the EIS.

The Department consulted with government agencies and Narrabri Shire Regional Council throughout the assessment process.

The key issues raised by the community (including in public submissions) and considered in the Department's Assessment Report include energy transition, land use compatibility and traffic and transport impacts.

Other issues are addressed in detail in the Department's Assessment Report.

| Issue                                                                                                                 | Consideration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <p><i>Land use compatibility</i></p>                                                                                  | <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site is located on land zoned RU1 Primary Production under the Narrabri LEP. As such, the project is permissible with consent through the Transport and Infrastructure SEPP.</li> <li>The project is consistent with the New England North West Regional Plan.</li> <li>Siting of the project has avoided important agricultural land, with the project area being ground-truthed as Class 4 and 5 under the Land and Soil Capability Mapping for NSW (OEH 2017), indicating agricultural uses are largely restricted to low-moderate impact uses such as grazing and minimal horticulture. The combined development footprint with the other proposed, approved and/or operational SSD solar farms in the New England North West region would be approximately 5,905 ha. The loss of this land represents an extremely small proportion (0.09%) of the 6.7 million ha of land currently used for agricultural output in the region. It would result in a negligible reduction in the overall productivity of the region.</li> <li>The site is to be returned to agricultural use following decommissioning. Accordingly, the Department is satisfied that the project would not result in any significant reduction in agricultural productivity of the region or of local agribusiness.</li> <li>Agricultural operations of adjoining landholders would not be impacted as weeds would be controlled through strict land management measures, erosion and sediment risks can be managed effectively by implementing a Soil and Water Management Plan, water pollution is not permitted, and noise and dust would not be significant.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain agricultural land capability.</li> <li>Maintain the groundcover of the site following construction or upgrading, maintain the groundcover with appropriate perennial species and manage weeds within the groundcover.</li> <li>Minimise any soil erosion associated with the construction, upgrading or decommissioning of the development.</li> <li>Ensure that the development does not cause any water pollution, as defined under section 120 of the <i>Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997</i> (POEO Act).</li> <li>Ensure that noise associated with the construction, operation, upgrading and decommissioning of the project complies with the relevant noise criteria.</li> <li>Minimise dust generated by the development.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Hazards</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Bushfire</i></li> <li><i>Contamination</i></li> </ul> | <p><i>Bushfire</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whitehaven Energy has provided an assessment of the proposed solar farm against the provisions of <i>Planning for Bushfire Protection 2019</i> (PBP 2019).</li> <li>Whitehaven Energy's bushfire assessment found that the project would not increase the potential for, or the severity of, bushfires and that any risk associated with onsite activities can be effectively minimised by complying with the design requirements of PBP 2019.</li> <li>The Department considers that the bushfire risks can be suitably controlled through the implementation of standard fire management procedures and recommendations made by FRNSW and RFS.</li> </ul> <p><i>Contamination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twenty-nine community submissions raised concerns regarding contamination of the subject site. Whitehaven Energy prepared a Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) report that was prepared in consideration of <i>State Environmental Planning Policy</i> (Resilience and Hazards) 2021.</li> <li>The PSI report found no records of significant potentially contaminating activities or commercial/industrial activities on site and concluded that the land is unlikely to contain significant contamination.</li> <li>Regarding the possible contamination of the site from the solar farm itself, the Department's <i>Frequently Asked Questions – Large Scale Solar Guideline</i> document outlines that the use of metals in solar panels has not been found to pose a risk to the environment as they are enclosed in thin layers between sheets of glass or plastic within the solar panel. To readily release contaminants into the environment, solar panels would need to be ground to a fine dust. As such, contamination of soil resulting from the proposal is not expected.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department considers the site is suitable for development subject, and contamination risks from the project are minimal and can be appropriately managed.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The BESS must not exceed a total delivery capacity of 10 MW and an energy storage capacity of 10 MWh across the site and must be installed in an arrangement consistent with the EIS.</li> <li>An Emergency Plan would be prepared for the development.</li> <li>Ensure the project complies with the relevant asset protection requirements in PBP 2019 and Standards for APZs.</li> <li>All chemicals, fuels and oils to be stored in accordance with Australian Standards and EPA requirements.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><i>Biodiversity Impacts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Impacts on native flora and fauna</i></li> </ul>                                                    | <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site predominantly comprises areas currently utilised for agricultural activities.</li> <li>Whitehaven Energy designed the project to avoid and minimise impacts on high-quality vegetation and habitat. The impacts on native vegetation would generate 2 species credits and 404 ecosystem credits under the BC Act which would be retired through the NSW Biodiversity Offset Scheme.</li> <li>Whitehaven Energy undertook an assessment of the project against the SAIL principles. CPHR, and accordingly the Department, are satisfied that the project would not result in a SAIL to any biodiversity values.</li> <li>Overall, the Department considers that the project is unlikely to result in a significant impact on biodiversity values.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whitehaven Energy must not clear any native vegetation or fauna habitat located outside the approved disturbance areas.</li> <li>Retire the applicable biodiversity offset credits in accordance with the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme.</li> <li>Prepare and implement a Biodiversity Management Plan in consultation with CPHR, including measures to protect and manage vegetation and fauna habitat outside the approved disturbance area.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Energy Transition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Impacts of renewable energy development</i></li> <li><i>Reliability of renewable energy</i></li> </ul> | <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seventeen community submissions raised concerns regarding the impacts of renewable energy development.</li> <li>The project aligns with national and State policies by diversifying energy generation, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing energy security, with a solar capacity of 20 MW, capable of powering the Narrabri Coal Mine and contributing to NSW's net zero emissions goal by 2050.</li> <li>As such, the project would play an important role in increasing renewable energy generation and capacity and contributing to the transition to a cleaner energy system.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |