5 July 2024
The Hon. Paul Scully MP MLA
Member for Wollongong
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces
Parliament of NSW
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Dear Mr Scully,

**Validity of claims by Renewable Energy Proponents re No. of Households Served by proposed Generators**

**Executive Summary**

From an analysis of real generation data for an example solar farm, coupled with a reliable set of household consumption data, it is shown that the claims made as to households served and the scale of battery storage required for a particular proposed solar farm in NSW are, quite simply, considerably overstated. These findings beg the question as to how many other such proposals, perhaps already approved by Planning NSW and the Independent Planning Commission (IPCN), have made similar, untested, claims.

There are several important consequences of these overstatements by proponents.
1. To service a given expected level of Demand, always an essential metric for which to have a reliable estimate, if it is found in subsequent operation that proponents have wildly overstated the demand that their proposed generators might service, then either far more generators will have to be built, posing significantly increased environmental and social impacts, destruction of valuable farmland, etc., or, where not addressed, massive Statewide power shortages will be the inevitable consequence.
2. Addressing any serious shortfall in battery storage would require a massive increase in the number of BESS installations, resulting in similarly vastly increased social and environmental impacts, and a massively increased fire hazard to surrounding regions, the latter resulting from the inherent safety issues endemic in the Li-ion battery technology itself.
3. Massively increased waste disposal issues resulting from the hugely increased resource requirements. It is to be kept in mind that solar panels do not last 25 years as claimed by proponents, and batteries, from the Hornsdale experience, have a service life of less that 10 years.

To give some idea of how far wrong the proponent is in its calculations, even with a battery storage equivalent to 450 Geelong Big Batteries, a number which would be impossible to fit into the selected site, the proponent's solar farm can never supply 262,000 homes.

This poor performance needs to be considered in conjunction with such as the spectacularly poor performance of wind generation across the Eastern Australian grid during the present calendar year. Wind's poor performance occurs frequently, if chaotically. In this background, to consider the further closure of coal-fired generation in the hope that wind plus solar generation plus battery storage will replace it is best described as an extremely dangerous policy.

**Introduction**

So often we see the claims in proposals for Wind and Solar Farms, or other such renewable energy facilities, that for any given proposal, the proponent claims that, it will "power so-and-so-many thousand homes". How valid are these claims and how readily might they be checked?

I thought to examine one such claim and to provide my findings to you as the Minister responsible for the Planning Approvals process here in New South Wales.

The starting point for any such analysis is the obtaining of reliable data as to the average household consumption of electricity in NSW.

In searching for official data on household electricity and gas consumption, I found the publication by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) entitled:
"*Residential Energy Consumption Benchmarks*", published on 9 Deccember 2020,
and available at:
https://www.aer.gov.au/system/files/Residential%20energy%20consumption%20benchmarks%20-%209%20December%202020_0.pdf

I have chosen data from that very comprehensive document for what the authors refer to as Climate Zone 5. See Table 16 on page 37. According to the preamble in section 4.2.4.Climate Zone 5:

"*The sample includes 1,908 households in Climate Zone 5. This includes 1,339 in New South Wales and 505 in South Australia. Climate Zone 5 covers several metropolitan areas including greater Sydney and Adelaide. The remaining 64 are in Queensland, in a small pocket to the immediat west of Brisbane.*"

I have chosen the Climate Zone 5 data as being representative of the household consumption patterns in the region of Eastern Australia in which the particular proposed project is to be sited. From that same Table 16, I have chosen the data as representative of households in NSW, that is, covering the wider region within which the proposed project is to be situated, and which therefore it is most likely to supply. Climate Zone 5 Table 16 data for NSW is reproduced below:

"*Table 16: Climate Zone 5: Electricity consumption benchmarks by household size (kWh)*"

| State/Territory | Household size | Summer | Autumn | Winter | Spring |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NSW | 1 | 732 | 745 | 927 | 705 |
| NSW | 2 | 1,278 | 1,232 | 1,565 | 1,162 |
| NSW | 3 | 1,530 | 1,503 | 1,903 | 1,425 |
| NSW | 4 | 1,819 | 1,717 | 2,148 | 1,627 |
| NSW | 5+ | 2,158 | 2,082 | 2,761 | 2,007 |

For my analysis, I have chosen the line in the above table for a household of 4 persons. What I did was to use the seasonal average consumption of a representative household of 4 persons in conjunction with 5-minute AEMO SCADA data for a representative generator, scaled to match the specifications of a solar farm proposed here in New South Wales for a similar location.

**Preliminaries**

For this analysis, I chose the claims made by the proponent for the Birrawa Solar Farm, a proposal that is, I understand, presently before NSW Planning for consideration.
At the proponent's website: https://acenrenewables.com.au/project/birriwa-solar/
under the opening heading "The project", the following relevant claims are made:

1. "*It will generate enough energy to power approximately 262,000 average Australian homes.*"

2. "*The solar component of the project will have a capacity of around 600 megawatts (MW) and include a centralised Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) of up to 600 MW for 2 hours. The BESS will enable energy from solar to be stored and then released during times of demand.*"

The Issued Scoping Report at:
https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSD-29508870%2120211012T060833.452%20GMT
provides the further relevant information that, *"Birriwa Solar Farm which includes:*
- *the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generation facility with an estimated capacity of up to 600 MW; and*
- *associated infrastructure, including grid connection and battery storage of up to approximately 1,000 MW (with an energy storage duration of up to four hours)."*

From these statements I have presumed that: the Solar Farm is to have a capacity of 600 MW, and the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will have a capacity of 4000 MWh (1000 MW output times 4 hours).

**Analysis - Ability of the Solar Farm plus BESS to supply the claimed number of households**

It is an oft-overlooked fact, where renewables proponents discuss the performance of wind and solar generation in terms of average outputs, that solar panels produce no electricity whatsoever at night, all night, every night, 365 days per year, (includes leap year nights too!).

Any associated battery storage must therefore make up the supply shortfall, this being the full requirement of any power generated by the solar facility, for an average of 12 of those hours, at the very least, of every 24-hour day of the year, (the 12 hour period being an average value for the period commonly known as "night-time", or "darkness").

The proponent states that the proposed BESS has a storage capacity of 1000 MW times 4 hours, providing a potential maximum battery storage capacity of some 4000 MWh.
Presuming that the BESS battery is fully charged at any given sunset, and not allowing for losses, (which are indeed significant, and will be required to be fully accounted for in any detailed analysis), the question is: how many homes can the battery supply during the 12 hours of the night?

In any proper analysis, proponents must show, to satisfy the latter part of the second claim above, that the BESS battery will be able to supply the full Demand, required by 262,000 homes, during the full night time period, including long winter nights. That's the implied meaning of: "*The BESS will enable energy from solar to be stored and then released during times of demand.*"

Any detailed analysis must allow that the hours of darkness for each day vary throughout the year, being a minimum at the Summer Solstice and a maximum at the Winter Solstice (which incidentally, for 2024, has occurred just prior to the writing of this document). In considering the worst-case scenario, on winter nights, the night-time period is significantly longer than 12 hours, even in New South Wales at the latitude of the proposed location for the Birrawa facility.

For this analysis, I have presumed that the period to be considered commences on 1 January 2023, and ends at 10 June 2024, so that the initial nights, the period of darkness is close to the minimum for the Summer, so, for the purposes of the analysis, is favourable to the facility's initial start state.

For generator data, I am using the real-time 5-minute generation data, publicly available from the AEMO, the operator of the Eastern Australian Grid, for the solar farm at Darlington Point New South Wales, which is listed by the AEMO as having an installed capacity of 245 MW. I have

multiplied the output at each 5-minute data point by a factor of 2.182, (the multiplier being derived from the fact that as the stated capacity of the Birrawa solar generator is to be an installed capacity of 600 MW, then its output at any time, given that it is to be sited at a location not far distant from the Darlington Point facility in a similar climatic region, can be considered, to a first approximation, to be 600/285 times the output of the Darlington Point facility), and replaced it in the generator table.

The next step is, at each 5-minute timestep, to determine the Demand during that 5-minutes, resulting from 262,000 average Australian homes, in Zone 5 of the above table, each home comprising a 4-person household, these values varying as to the Season of the calendar year.

These Demand values are added to the generator table constructed above.

It is then a relatively simple matter to proceed to step through the table,

- determining the difference between the generator Supply and the Demand;
- adding (if a generation surplus) or subtracting (demand during the 5-minute period being greater than generator supply) the result from the current state of the BESS battery charge, terminating the process should the BESS battery charge state drop below 20-percent of rated capacity, or if not;
- repeating the preceding steps at the next 5-minute time step to re-run the calculation, until;
- the last 5-minute time step is processed, indicating that for the given time span, the solar generator plus BESS is able to satisfy the Demand imposed by 262,000 average Australian homes.

Limits: where the battery continues to discharge, the battery charge may not fall below 20-percent of the rated capacity (here 4000 MWh times 0.2 = 800 MWh), as such a state of discharge has a detrimental effect on battery lifetime. Where the battery charges, it may not charge to above 80-percent of full capacity, that is 3200 MWh. These then are the lower and upper limits of the battery's state of charge, (for the choice of these limits, see, for example, (Post, 2019).

**Results**

Commencing the run at 12:05 AM, that is, just after midnight on 1 January 2023, with an initial charge as the 80-percent limit, that is, 3200 MWh, the run terminated with the battery being discharged to its 20-percent limit at 2:05 AM on 2 January 2023.

This is a definitive result. A BESS of 4000 MWh capacity is incapable of supplying the Demand requirements of 262,000 homes for even 2 nights of the year 2023, at the height of the Summer months, when nights are shortest.

**Conclusion 1** The above analysis shows that the claim by the proponent that the solar "farm", presuming that it has an installed capacity of 600 MW, that it will supply 262,000 average homes, can best be described as wildly optimistic.

This massive failure requires a clear explanation from the proponent showing, in detail, how the calculations were performed and what assumptions were used, to arrive at a number of 262,000 average Australian homes served.

It is tempting to re-run the calculation, decreasing the number of households each time until, if possible, a value for the number of households might be reached where the process is able to step through the entire time period under consideration, that is: 1 January 2023 – 10 June 2024.

I did repeat the process and found that the 600 MW Solar Farm plus 4000MWh capacity BESS battery is able to support some 22,500 average Australian households, that is, some 11.64 times less than that claimed by the proponent, so of the order of 10-percent of the proponent's claim..

I also chose a Battery Storage value of 200,000 MWh, which is a very large battery, being in fact the equivalent of some 450 Geelong Big Batteries, but even with this amount of storage, the combined system, addressing the Demand of 262,000 average Australian homes, fell over at 2023/04/18 02:35:00, that is, after some 3 and a half months operation. Clearly, where even using a battery storage that is so large, so gargantuan, that it is completely unachievable, also fails, then the claim that the proposed solar farm will serve 262,000 homes is in the realms of fairyland.

It is clear from this last run that the required demand simply runs down the initial battery storage, that is, in attempting to supply 262,000 homes, the solar farm is unable to recharge the battery sufficiently to any extent at all.

**Conclusion 2** If the claim made by the proponent for the Birrawa Solar Project as to number of homes served is typical of the process being used generally by proponents of renewable energy projects that come before Planning NSW, then this analysis suggests that serious questions need to be asked about the assessment methods presently used, by both Planning NSW, and the Independent Planning Commission.

Yours faithfully,
Paul Miskelly
Moss Vale NSW
[redacted]

**References**

Round-trip battery efficiencies are mentioned in:
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Limits of Li-ion grid-scale battery charge/discharge:
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