

Tuesday, 30 August 2016

Gary West  
Chair Northern Joint Regional  
Planning Panel  
C/O Planning and Community  
Development Department  
Moree Plains Shire Council  
[council@mpsc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@mpsc.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Gary,

**Re: Submission to the Joint Regional Planning Panel on the development application for the erection of a 3.6MW solar farm at Bruxner Road, Boggabilla**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Regional Planning Panel (regional panel) on the development application for the erection of a 3.6MW solar farm at Bruxner Road, Boggabilla (the proposed solar farm). Moree Plains Shire Council (Council) supports the role of the regional panel in the determination of regionally significant development applications and the independent expertise that the regional panel brings to the assessment process. Council does not seek to make comment on the assessment report prepared by council staff, rather, the following submission is intended to provide the regional panel with information on the local context and community aspirations to assist them in their determination of the development application.

**Our Shire**

With a Gross Regional Product (GRP) of approximately \$737 million, Moree Plains Shire is one of the most agriculturally productive local government areas in Australia. We are also home to extensive manufacturing and support industries, and well-developed artistic, cultural, educational, sport, recreational and social opportunities.

**Our Challenge**

Because agriculture is the dominant industry in our Shire (43.7% of GRP and almost all of the exports from the region), the whole economy is affected by varying seasons and agricultural commodity prices. Severe drought during the mid-2000s and the substantial global shift to mechanisation in agriculture and larger farming properties with fewer jobs (ABARES, 2012) have contributed to a decline in local agricultural employment (-19.52% between 2001 and 2006). The limited diversity of our local economy has resulted in out-migration of workers and families, especially when replacement jobs are not readily available (1,741 people left our Shire between 2001 and 2006).

Facing similar declines in agricultural employment, neighbouring shires have embraced coal mining and coal seam gas extraction (one shire experienced 703.13% growth in mining sector employment between 2006 and 2011). Coal seam and conventional gas extraction have the potential to expand into our Shire, particularly in the northern portion within the Bowen Basin between Moree and Boggabilla, but our community remain extremely concerned about the potential for mining to displace agricultural industries and question its contribution to the long-term sustainability of our Shire.

Our community, through *Moree Plains 2035* (our Community Strategic Plan), aspires to be *an environmental role model* and recognises that the environment must be safeguarded to ensure the long term prosperity of our Shire (MPSC, 2011). In support of this, the community is committed to living sustainably and using our resources responsibly and, in particular, foreshadows a need to 'look at long-term sustainability in terms of solar power'. Further, we accept that diversification of a regional economy is fundamental to employment growth and attracting in-migration (Lawson & Dwyer, 2002) and our community has identified *a vibrant regional economy* as a cornerstone of their vision of the future of our Shire (MPSC, 2011).

## **Our Future**

In shaping our Shire to deliver on our community's goals, Council see the renewable energy sector as a key part of the diversification of our economy that is essential to deliver *a vibrant regional economy* for our community whilst also contributing to their aspirations to be *an environmental role model*. The renewable energy sector is diverse in itself and it is essential for our Shire to capitalise on its unique geographic and climatic conditions in pursuing interests in this industry. Our Shire has excellent conditions for solar farms due to high solar radiation levels and a suitable average temperature range for photovoltaic systems (NSW Govt., 2012). We have the potential to make a significant contribution to the transition of NSW to a low emissions economy (NSW 2021 set a 20% renewable energy target) and have been identified as part of one of the key renewable energy precincts in NSW (NSW Govt., 2012). In this regard both Council and our community were highly supportive of the Moree Solar Farm project by Fotowatio Renewable Ventures, a 56MW solar farm located 10 km south of Moree that generates enough electricity to supply around 15,000 homes, reduces 95,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and saves approximately 165,000 mega litres of clean drinking water, completed earlier this year and now supplying solar energy to the National Electricity Market (AREA, 2016).

## **The quadruple bottom line**

As one of the key organisations charged with implementing *Moree Plains 2035*, Council supports initiatives, such as the proposed solar farm, that deliver the *social, environmental, economic and civic leadership* outcomes desired by our community. The *environmental* and *economic* outcomes of the proposed solar farm are well articulated in this submission; however, there are positive *social* and *civic leadership* aspects to consider.

There are multiple instances of socio-economic disadvantage in Boggabilla and an important *social* outcome of the proposed solar farm is the economic activity and developer contributions that will assist Council in providing and maintaining community facilities to the Boggabilla community.

An important outcome of *civic leadership* is community ownership and implementation of the Community Strategic Plan. Our community are heavily invested in the aspirations of *Moree Plains 2035* and it is therefore incumbent on Council advocate for the realisation of their vision for the future of our Shire. The proposed solar farm is an essential ingredient in delivering that vision and we ask that the regional panel take this into consideration in its determination of the development application.

If you would like me to expand on anything contained within this correspondence please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6757 3236.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Rodgers', written over a horizontal line.

Lester Rodgers  
**GENERAL MANAGER**

## References

- Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences [ABARES]. (2012). *Australian Commodity Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://adl.brs.gov.au/data/warehouse/agcstd9abcc002/agcstd9abcc0022012/ACS\\_2012\\_1.1.0.pdf](http://adl.brs.gov.au/data/warehouse/agcstd9abcc002/agcstd9abcc0022012/ACS_2012_1.1.0.pdf)
- Australian Renewable Energy Agency [AREA], (2016). *Moree Solar Farm starts feeding into the grid*. Retrieved from <http://arena.gov.au/media/moree-solar-farm-starts-feeding-into-the-grid/>
- Lawson, J. and Dwyer, J. (2002). *Labour Market Adjustment in Regional Australia*, Reserve Bank of Australia, Research Discussion Paper 2002-04.
- Moree Plains Shire Council [MPSC]. (2011). *Moree Plains 2035*. Retrieved from <http://www.mpsc.nsw.gov.au/index.php/about-us/planning-for-our-future/community-strategic-plan>
- NSW Government Department of Planning & Infrastructure. (2012). *New England North West Strategic Regional Land Use Plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-Your-Area/Regional-Plans/New-England-North-West>
- NSW Government. (2011). *NSW 2021: A plan to make NSW number one*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities>