

For Public Notice via Internet

REASONS FOR DECISION UNDER *ENVIRONMENT EFFECTS ACT 1978* (REFERRAL NUMBER 2023-R05)

Proponent

Elgin Energy Pty Ltd

Project

Barwon Solar Farm

Description

The project is located in the Balliang/Little River region on the lands of the Wadawurrung First Nations people, approximately 30 km north of Geelong. The project comprises a solar farm of approximately 330 MWp (Megawatt-peak) and a battery energy storage system (BESS) of approximately 500 MW. The project site covers an area of 735 ha, with solar panels proposed to cover approximately 505 ha of the total site area (65%).

Decision

The Minister for Planning has decided that an environment effects statement (EES) is not required for the Barwon Solar Farm project, as described in the referral initially accepted on 2 August 2023 and accounting for additional information provided by the proponent after acceptance of the referral, subject to the following conditions:

- a) An **environment report** for the Barwon Solar Farm project needs to be prepared in consultation with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and completed to the satisfaction of the Minister for Planning. The report needs to assess and document the following:
 - i. description of the proposed project;
 - ii. the predicted impacts on native vegetation and biodiversity values, including listed communities and species of flora and fauna under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999*;
 - iii. potential indirect effects of the works on biodiversity values including for example potential fragmentation of habitat, disturbance to fauna and changes in groundwater levels associated with the proposed removal of trees for the project;
 - iv. potential for cumulative effects with other major projects in the region;
 - v. alternative development configurations, layouts and designs to avoid and minimise adverse environmental effects (including mapping that clarifies the locations of proposed project infrastructure, works and construction areas);
 - vi. the mitigation measures proposed to avoid, minimise and / or manage potential effects on native vegetation, areas of potential habitat and biodiversity values in the report including use of no-go zones; and
 - vii. an **environmental management framework** that sets out the proposed environmental management commitments and how the environmental commitments would be governed through the different approvals required for the project.
- b) Once completed to the satisfaction of the Minister for Planning, the environment report and relevant supporting documentation is to be exhibited for public comments for at

least 14 calendar days, following which the proponent is to consider and respond to comments within updated documentation, to be submitted to the Minister for Planning.

- c) The environment report process is to be completed to inform the form of the project that is examined through planning and approval processes, in particular under the *Planning and Environment Act 1978*.

Reasons

- The project has the potential for significant environmental effects to biodiversity values and further consideration of these effects and examination of project alternatives to avoid and minimise these effects is warranted to inform consideration of approvals for the project.
- The conditions set out in this decision provide the most appropriate means for examining these potentially significant effects and related uncertainties, including the development of adequate measures to avoid and mitigate impacts in the context of relevant policy and regulatory requirements.
- Other potential effects should be readily addressed through respective statutory requirements under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Date : 26/05/2024