

Corop Solar Farm (Planning Application PLN249-2019) – Summary of objections by category

The table below provides a summary of objections and the Leeson Group (LG) response, along with any additional actions taken already, or expected to be conditions of a planning permit.

Not all objectors raised all the issues addressed: in many cases only one objector raised the issue. They have been grouped together for ease of reading and assessment; and to provide further information for the community.

Category	Objection	Response
1. Traffic impact	1.1 Traffic Impact Assessment Report (TIAR) was not provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A TIAR has now been completed to satisfy VicRoads requirements. However, it does not cover the local roads and therefore does not provide some of the information mentioned. The traffic impact specialist has produced a separate document to cover the concerns expressed. We have offered to meet (phone or video) with individual objectors to provide a summary of the new information. We expect a detailed Traffic Management Plan (TMP) will be a condition of permit. Where necessary this will include management for pedestrian safety.
	1.2 Failure to assess traffic impacts on roads as per planning scheme requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per 1.1
	1.3 Risks have not been assessed for the local roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree this has not been adequately spelt out. Response as 1.1.
	1.4 Road safety for families, school children and other road users. Children will need more supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree this has not been adequately spelt out. Response as per 1.1 plus: We will liaise with freight companies about arrival times to minimise movements in the standard school arrival/departure hours. Closer to construction we are happy to meet with parents of children using this bus stop with a view to reaching agreement about potential issues and solutions.
	1.5 Suggestion for flashing light at bus stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A flashing light would not be the norm. Depending on road regulations, signage could be provided (if not already in place).
	1.6 Interruption to traffic on Old Corop Rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During construction there may be some disruption. This would be minimised and managed according to the Traffic Management Plan if required.



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community consultation plan would provide wide notice of any major disruption; and specific notice to local residents.
	1.7 Interruption to stock movement	See business impact (Category 6).
2. Road maintenance	2.1 Damage to local roads especially unsealed ones during construction, including who bears cost of repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leeson Group is in discussion with Council on this. It is a likely condition of permit that any damage is repaired as a project expense.
	2.2 Ongoing maintenance of local roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once construction is complete there will be very little heavy traffic associated with the solar farm.
	2.3 All relevant roads should be sealed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We understand some residents and farmers may like the roads to be sealed, but the amount of traffic generated by the project overall will not warrant this. Traffic and condition of the road will be managed during construction.
3. Landscaping and screening	3.1 Panels can be seen from elevated homes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Visual impact (Category 4).
	3.2 Landscape Management Plan should be submitted prior to planning approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our experience suggests that developing the Landscape Management Plan (LMP) as part of detailed construction planning will allow the best choice of species and take advantage of any minor changes to farm layout. The LMP will likely be a condition of permit and must be approved by Council. We commit to maintain the vegetation and replacing it if it dies and are happy to have this as a condition of permit.
	3.3 No explanation of what tree species will be planted, their suitability to the area and likely endurance in a changing climate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) mapped as occurring at the specific proposed solar farm site will be used in the screening detailed in the LMP. We will consult with council and the vegetation will infill to their requirements. We will discuss screening with and adjacent landowners with a view to reaching mutual agreement on planting.
	3.4 No screening on the east side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal has been amended: screening will be provided on all boundaries.
	3.5 The vegetation screening will take 10 years to grow to cover the solar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vegetation will likely take about 5 years to grow to a mature height. Shade cloth can be used in the interim if the visual impact is high (as assessed by an independent specialist).

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	panels. It should be well established prior to construction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LG is looking at various options for procuring appropriate plants as soon as possible so they have the best opportunity to establish themselves.
	3.6 Old Corop Rd screening is not adequate and will need to be bolstered considerably for it to screen the solar panels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no 'rule' that says solar panels by definition should be invisible. There are people who like to see positive steps on renewables. However, the Landscape Management Plan will include infill screening to supplement existing plantings.
	3.7 Who will maintain the vegetation, does the council allocate staff and funds for this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The screening is predominantly inside the solar farm boundaries and vegetation will be maintained or replace if necessary by the operator. Any additional screening on crown land would be maintained by the relevant authority unless otherwise agreed.
4. Visual impact not specifying landscaping	4.1 Inadequate setback from boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The setback is from the property boundary and is a minimum of 20 metres. In many areas it is greater than that.
	4.2 Incorrect number of impacted dwellings identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In preparing the Planning Report LG mapped all buildings within a five kilometre radius of the corner of Old Corop Road and Geodetic Road. The four properties identified in the report were those considered likely to be affected. We are happy to visit and discuss concerns of other residents, or look at any photographs they provide of viewpoints.
	4.3 Impact on farmland landscape views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will look at protecting very specific views. Our investigations suggest all our neighbours have multiple aspects to view similar landscapes. We had planned to visit individual properties but COVID 19 restrictions have made this impossible. To offset this we have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invited individuals to send photographs of the viewpoints that concern them so we can more accurately assess potential impacts. Provided photographs from properties surrounding the Cohuna solar farm which demonstrate comparable distances and views. We note some of the neighbouring homes are set back behind trees or other farm infrastructure. As shown in the Cohuna photographs, distant landscape elements often render the panels in the foreground almost invisible.

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	4.4 Impact on property value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are not aware of any Australian research on property values around solar farms, or of documented information on solar farms reducing the value of nearby properties. Research in the USA shows there is no overall negative effect on property values; and where there is individual effect it is statistically insignificant in the planning process.
5. Glare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on sunset views Impact on aviation activity Impact on stock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panels are non reflective. We have prepared a fact sheet on glare which has been provided to the objectors. We have asked for further information regarding the airstrip mentioned, to understand usual movements.
6. Business impact	<p>6.1 The proposal should avoid the loss of productive agricultural land and consider the impact of any loss on the agricultural sector.</p> <p>There is no thorough assessment of subject land's production potential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal has clearly considered the impact on land use. Planning report section 5.11 outlines a plan for dual use which is being assessed and developed throughout the development stage of the project. The most likely outcome is that the land will be used for grazing; and cropping in sections may also be viable. There is a clear benefit for the project owners to have a dual income from the land and maintaining it will reduce any future costs of returning it to agricultural use. This approach also provides additional outcomes for local community by maintaining farming practices and increasing local skills to farm within solar arrays. Aside from the above, we believe analysis of production <i>potential</i> is unnecessary. It would not be required of someone proposing to revert high intensity feeding to grass feeding, for example.
	6.2 No assurance that neighbouring farming activities will be able to continue, including stock movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solar farming is a passive use of land. We anticipate no disruption during operation. There may be some disruption with delivery and construction vehicles using local roads. The construction management plan and traffic management plan likely to be required as conditions of the planning permit will have the objective of minimising disruption. During phone discussion with objectors we invited information on whether there are specific dates or times that should be avoided during construction. We will work with adjacent farming or other businesses to minimise any impact by understanding their specific concerns.
	6.3 No assurance that we won't be liable, for example, if dust raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no legal avenue for us to sue adjoining neighbours for creating dust in the course of their normal farming activity.

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	during agricultural activity settles on the solar panels.	
7. Surface water (Water flows, salt and flooding)	7.1 Concern about whether flood water will behave differently with solar infrastructure replacing open grassland; specifically whether it will adversely affect adjoining properties or local roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The hydrologist has provided additional information regarding methodology. This information has been provided to the objectors and they have been invited to discuss their concerns further.
	7.2 Concern that current groundcover supports current water flow and helps control manage salinity; and that if groundcover is significantly reduced it will impact soil quality and flood impacts	See 7.1
	7.3 Reports haven't clearly specified the size of the catchment area that will feed into and through the solar farm site	See 7.1
	7.4 The assumed 25 per cent run-off from the catchment area may be accurate over a long period, but would misrepresent run-off during high rainfall years.	See 7.1.
	7.5 Assumption about 'impermeable' panels and sealed roads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The panels are not fixed: their movement from horizontal to angled mean any rainfall will reach the earth below. Internal tracks will not be sealed.
	7.6 Local experience suggests some information in the hydrology report is inaccurate.	<p>See 7.1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We respect the lived experience in specific years: but the report must be averaged because it's providing information to be used in the future.

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8. Dust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dust from traffic Dust will affect the panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Construction Management Plan, Environment Management Plan and Traffic Management Plan if required, will provide the means to minimise any impact. Solar farm routine maintenance includes cleaning of solar modules. Landscape screening will also provide mitigation of dust.
9. Eagles, birdlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of 1100 ha of hunting ground being lost Ongoing monitoring of wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The flora and fauna specialist has provided further information which has been passed on to the objectors. Notably: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The eagles will be able to move around and under the panels: movement of the panels is slow and will not injure or impede the birds activities. Eagles cover a wide area in hunting. They would routinely cover the areas beyond the proposed solar farm Photographs of the Cohuna solar farm show birds of prey hunting above the solar arrays. We are advised these birds did not leave the area, even during construction.
10. Cultural heritage	No specific objection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is managed through the Cultural Heritage Management Plan which will be completed in the coming months.
11. Consultation	11.1 Consultation was not well advertised and not robust as stated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree consultation could have been better managed. We have now engaged a consultation and engagement specialist. A consultation plan has been submitted to Council. We have prepared fact sheets which are on the Leeson Group website. They have been provided to individuals and to council for further distribution. A revised consultation report will be submitted with the final submission. We will meet with objectors and interested parties about local information and ideas.
	11.2 Take advantage of local knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to meet with objectors and other interested parties as planning progresses to take advantage of local knowledge and share ideas.
12. Community benefit	12.1 No evidence provided of benefit sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree this has not been adequately covered. A fact sheet has been prepared and distributed, which includes principles, ideas and examples from previous projects and calls for community ideas. We will consult with the community: initially to gather ideas; then to refine and decide if the permit is granted.

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	12.2 Request for funding for drainage work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're happy to discuss ideas for community benefits but this may be outside project capacity.
13. Ongoing obligations	13.1 Concern about obligations included in the planning permit being met if the project is on sold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conditions of the planning permit, and the proposal as approved, must be met by any developer and the owner at the time of decommissioning. We have considered and applied the Victorian Solar Energy Facilities Design and Development Guideline.
	13.2 Concern about decommissioning process, including removing aggregate	<p>As per 13.1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The life of a solar farm is typically 20-30 years. The decommissioning process (as opposed to obligation) will depend on environmental and other considerations which could be quite different that far into the future.
14. Meeting Vic gov guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple quotes from statutory documents and guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We believe we have considered and complied with all statutory requirements and guidelines. Many of these are covered in the previous categories of objections.
15. Biomix legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effects on traffic, create dust deteriorating road condition, Repairs to Geodetic Rd not effective 	<p>As per Category 1, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truck traffic is not an issue once the solar farm is operational. We are happy to discuss lessons learned with Council, Biomix and objectors, if it is considered useful by Council.