

## Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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<b>Submitted by:</b>	Kellie Wilkie
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Our regional communities are feeling the effects of social impact and the cumulative impacts of industrial scale developments that they cannot effectively fight.

For many the battle is ongoing and marked by continual efforts to have their voices heard above the cries of “more renewable energy”. Some of our friends and families have over 400 letters to show for 7 years of trying to prevent their agricultural land from the risk of pollution from a solar plant. This loss of time translates to nearly a full year of time spent taking politicians around the property, getting them all to agree that the land is far too productive to be turned into a massive 9000 acre shed effectively, and for what? Still no legislation protects them from the potential for disaster.

While we as farmers are required to comply with Reef Legislation to protect the Great Barrier Reef, sometimes up to 700km away – this project on their boundary fence is exempt from the same laws and regulations. Yet the million Chinese solar panels, fully imported and shipped then trucked to the property next door to “save the planet” are of no risk? In a cyclone and hail prone area? Where potential leaching and watershed could be put down to an accident that couldn’t be predicted?

The Smoky Creek Solar project would be a good case for these Community Benefits and Social Impacts to be tested against. Using the Social Impact Assessment Guideline (March 2018), here’s what this would look like if this Guideline held any weight:

## 2.2 SIA Principles –

### 2.3.1 Scoping –

Yes, the project uses existing transmission lines.

However, the size of the project is massive, 9,000ha under panels. Class B Agricultural Land, as identified by the State Government as unsuitable for industrial projects like these.

Potential social impacts – has already divided communities and families. Closest neighbour will be less than 100m from their kitchen table to solar panels. The Tenacious Ten have combined to write letters to every department, every official, every politician including letters from solicitors that have gone unanswered. This has been an ongoing effort since 2017 – entering into their 8<sup>th</sup> year.

The local communities were not even afforded a community meeting, nor were they told about the project from their neighbours.

The local roads are completely inadequate to carry the traffic throughout the construction period, and the closest roads are school bus routes.

There is no housing anywhere in the area, and the workers will need to be located in Rockhampton and travel in daily (1.5hrs to site) x 300 workforce.

### 2.3.2 Baseline analysis –

The demographic profile of these communities leans heavily towards family farms, multi-generational properties, with aging population.

The community culture and values, community history, community well-being, land/property ownership and utilisation of natural resources – well this is where the SIA really falls down. This is a small community of Jambin and Goovigen, where a rural township of approximately

100 people is the centre of the farms that surround. Featuring a small pub/hotel with meals and cold beers, and often a rural post office and public toilets – and that's all. Both Jambin and Goovigen have Community Halls and Jambin has a church with services once a month. These communities are your classic farming towns, where generations live and thrive.

But now we have the divisive nature of the industrial get-rich-quick scheme, aimed at tired farmers who work hard every day, to produce food for Australia. It's sold as "Diversification of Income" ie – we'll give you money to use your land for 20-50 years. You don't have to do anything!

When packaged with a Non-Disclosure agreement it becomes life changing. You can't chat to your neighbours, not with secrets under your hat. You can't sit in the pub on a Friday night and have a few drinks, not when you are keeping this to yourself. And now we see the isolation start to creep in. Pretty soon the whole family can't talk freely to anyone about the project managers and their "too good to be true" offers. And while there's a few up-front sweeteners, the family is left sitting on their hands waiting for the project to go ahead. Often the children change schools, change friend groups to avoid the discussions with family friends about the rumours circulating.

The waiting begins once the project gets out with "Community Consultation" which never happened ironically for Smoky Creek, despite the 15 page glossy paperwork that they submitted to demonstrate what it should look like, complete with pictures of sheep grazing under the solar panels on fields of green grass.

In the meantime, the affected neighbours who have just found out are devastated. Their mental health declines with every announcement; that the local Council can't prevent it, the Members of Parliament can't prevent it, the off-take agreements are sold to bigger companies. All the while, trying to go about your daily farming activities with the threat of loss of this property that you intended for your own family to raise cattle on for the next generations.

Even if you've never been on facebook, you learn to use social media and television and youtube to get Australia to pay attention to what is happening to your community and farming land.

Now, in your baseline analysis, where does this rank in terms of importance?

Shouldn't this destruction of family, community and traditional values of mateship and honesty be enough to highlight the issues of Social Impact?

How is it out-ranked by the need for more electricity, all the while turning off the coal-fired power stations that are in your region already? And the 260 workers that will lose their jobs while 300 come in by bus to destroy your roads and community fabric?

Given all of the above, how do you use a Social Impact Assessment to mitigate these issues? Is a new Community Facility enough to outweigh this? In Jambin's case it was a \$20,000 modular building for a Post Office that was enough to tick the box.

If the proponent of these projects was required to meet a minimum contribution of say 2% of their profits – is this enough? At least at a fixed rate there may be enough paid to maintain the roads that their own use will destroy and increase the land rates costs for the council area.

Telecommunications, roads and restoring our schools and hospitals should be a minimum starting point for contribution from these companies. While suffering from the development

on your fence, it is crazy to think that the benefits will be paid to the township for social licence.

#### 2.3.4 Impact Assessment –

And Impact Significance. I have already covered these in my thoughts on the Baseline analysis. These are significant impacts that cannot be mitigated in any significant way without stopping the project in its entirety.

The duration of the impact is also noted in this section. The Smoky Creek Solar has just announced that they are adding Battery Storage to the plans, a BESS on the fenceline – closest to the neighbours who have been leading the fight the most. Plenty of acreage to put this on, but how about we locate it in the most inconvenient place to force them to sell out or give up?

And finally cumulative impacts are mentioned.

There are now around 85 projects in the Flynn electorate alone. The scale of these projects is horrendous and to even consider some of the pristine locations for the tops of mountains to be blasted to be able to add 280m high turbines, is just madness.

At what point do we wake up and recognise that our agricultural land must be protected and prioritised. When will we value our farmers and their stewardship of the land, and support them with legislation that helps, not hinders their efforts?

Other examples where the system is failing include the project featured on A Current Affair recently – at Bullyard, near Bundaberg. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Where is the protection for this unsuspecting landowner who purchased the land for future rural living, on quiet acreages where they could live in their forever home? At every turn they have been failed by legislation – including Police, Council and QCAT. This is another example of the erosion of our rights as a landowner.

I ask the State Government to use this opportunity to rectify the identified problems – not by more lip service and paperwork, but by real and lasting legislation with real outcomes including Community Consent/Approval instead of Community Engagement. Start with making Solar Guidelines mandatory and the legislation that applies to farmers to apply to solar and wind and BESS projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.