

Planning and Development (Conditional Environmental Significance Opinion – Block 12, Rendezvous Creek – Gudgenby Homestead Remote Power Supply) Notice 2019

Notifiable instrument NI2019–5

made under the

Planning and Development Act 2007, s 138AD (Requirements in relation to environmental significance opinions)

1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Planning and Development (Conditional Environmental Significance Opinion – Block 12, Rendezvous Creek – Gudgenby Homestead Remote Power Supply) Notice 2019*.

2 Conditional Environmental Significance Opinion

- (1) On 20 December 2018, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, pursuant to section 138AB(4) of the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (the **Act**), gave the Applicant a conditional environmental significance opinion in relation to construction, on Block 12, Rendezvous Creek, of solar panels and a battery system at the Gudgenby Homestead.

- (2) In this section:

Conditional environmental significance opinion means the opinion in the schedule.

Note Under section 138AD(6) of the Act, the conditional environmental significance opinion and this notice expire 18 months after the day the notice is notified.

Ben Ponton
Chief Planning Executive
4 January 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION

In accordance with section 138AB(4) of the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (the Act), I provide the following environmental significance opinion:

APPLICANT

WSP Australia Pty Ltd (on behalf of Evoenergy), as represented by Emma Taylor, Principal Environmental Scientist.

APPLICATION and DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The applicant has applied under section 138AA of the Act to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an environmental significance opinion to the effect that the development proposal set out in the submission is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact (the application).

The development proposal is for the installation of solar panels and a battery system at the Gudgenby Homestead as described in the submission.

LOCATION

Block 12 District of Rendezvous Creek - Namadgi National Park.

MATTERS TO WHICH THIS OPINION APPLIES

This opinion applies only the development proposal as described in the application.

OPINION

Provided the works are undertaken in the manner consistent with the following conditions, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s138AB(4) of the Act.

- All vehicles and construction equipment must be cleaned prior to entering Namadgi National Park and be free of weed and soil material.

- Movement of vehicles and machinery is to be limited to existing fire trails and access roads.

Attached is a Statement of Reasons for the decision.



Ian Walker
Conservator of Flora and Fauna

20 December 2018

STATEMENT OF REASONS REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed development is a proposal mentioned in Schedule 4 of the *Planning and Development Act 2007* – Development proposal for an activity requiring an EIS Schedule 4, being:

Part 4.3, item 3 proposal for development on land reserved under s 315 for the purpose of a wilderness area, national park, nature reserve or special purpose reserve.

The area of works is within Namadgi National Park.

The proponent wants the application for the development approval assessed in the merit track on the grounds that the proposal is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact, and has applied to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to that effect.

Meaning of *significant* adverse environmental impact

An adverse environmental impact is *significant* if—

- (a) the environmental function, system, value or entity that might be adversely impacted by a proposed development is significant; or
- (b) the cumulative or incremental effect of a proposed development might contribute to a substantial adverse impact on an environmental function, system, value or entity.

In deciding whether an adverse environmental impact is *significant*, the following matters must be taken into account:

- (a) the kind, size, frequency, intensity, scope and length of time of the impact;
- (b) the sensitivity, resilience and rarity of the environmental function, system, value or entity likely to be affected.

In deciding whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact it does not matter whether the adverse environmental impact is likely to occur on the site of the development or elsewhere.

It has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant environmental impact, based on the documentation submitted, known values of the site, and provided the works and ongoing management are carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to this ESO.

Project description

The Gudgenby Homestead precinct within Namadgi National Park includes a homestead with several bedrooms and a small cottage referred to as Ready Cut

Cottage, which is an early example of a kit home. The homestead has been upgraded and is used occasionally for overnight stays by visitors to Namadgi National Park. The maximum capacity of the homestead is around twenty people. Ready Cut Cottage is a more basic three bedroom cottage that is also available for overnight accommodation.

Power supply to the precinct is currently via a 7km long 11kv transmission line. It is intended to install a hybrid off-grid system to provide an alternative and reliable power supply to enable the future decommissioning of the existing power line to reduce the risk of bushfire ignitions.

The hybrid off-grid system will consist of solar panels, batteries, inverters, cabling, and racks. The panels will be installed within a paddock to the north-west of Gudgenby Homestead with the batteries stored in a 3-metre insulated container adjacent to the panels. Minor levelling of the existing surface is required and a concrete plinth will be installed to support the container.

The installation of the solar panels will impact an area of approximately 36.5 meters by 12.5 meters. In addition, an excavation trench is required to connect the panels to the power supply at the small shed north of the homestead. The solar panels will be surrounded by a lockable fence, the area cleared and grubbed, and covered with red crushed Ginninderra Granite, which is a locally sourced fill material.

Prior to installation of the solar panels, it is intended to collect soil samples by way of test pits up to 2.0m in depth to determine if the site has been impacted by contamination from previous uses.

Documentation Submitted

- Gudgenby Homestead Remote Area Power Supply Application for an Environmental Significance Opinion;
- Form 1M.

Natural conservation values present

Gudgenby Valley was settled by Europeans in the 1800's and used as a pastoral property until it was resumed by the Commonwealth in the 1970's. Human-induced change is evident in the valley as the woodlands and forests were cleared to extend the natural grasslands in the valleys for livestock grazing (Ingwersen 2001). These modified grassy valley floors are one of the more significant legacies of European occupation. Despite the removal of grazing in the 1970's, recolonisation by woody vegetation has not occurred to the extent expected. This is probably due to the prevalence of heavy frosts and grazing by rabbits and kangaroos.

Two vegetation communities were identified in the precinct during a site visit to inspect the area of works:

- The area adjacent to the Homestead is degraded and contains modified grassland with scattered exotic plantings
- To the west of the Homestead is a *Eucalyptus pauciflora* – *E. rubida* tableland woodland.

A desk top study noted that native grassland was mapped as occurring within the study area in the broadscale mapping undertaken by the ACT Government in 2018. However, the grassland vegetation within the area of works is dominated by exotic species and the proposal will not impact any areas of native grassland.

The report notes “The Eucalypt woodland occurred in the western section of the study area and consisted of an open woodland with dense ground cover of grasses, herbs and shrubs. This area had extensive fallen timber and groundcover vegetation providing refuge for a range of ground dwelling fauna. The study area contained seven eucalypt of a range of sizes as well as six stags, three of which had small hollows. The woodland was isolated from other remnant woody vegetation and was considered to be of moderate condition.

The exotic grassland and plantings provided limited foraging habitat for mobile species and was considered to be in poor condition.

Species recorded within the Proposal study area included common species of bird such as Dusky Woodswallow, Yellow Rumped Thornbill, Sulfur-crested Cockatoo, Raven, Welcome Swallow and Tree Martin. Frogs were recorded calling from the nearby creekline.”

No listed species were noted during the site visit undertaken to ground truth the desktop study.

Impact on the Reserve

There will be some visual impact from the installation with the solar array being partially visible from the front porch and front yard of Ready Cut Cottage, and from the Gudgenby Homestead. However, as the panels will be partially hidden by existing vegetation, and the view is already interrupted by the existing power lines, the impact is deemed to be acceptable.

The installation of the alternative power supply will allow for the decommissioning of the existing 11kv line, thereby reducing the likelihood of bushfire ignition caused by a failure of the lines, or by vegetation coming into contact with the lines. This will be a positive benefit to Namadgi National Park as a whole and increase the protection of the natural and cultural assets of the national park.

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts

The site for the panels has been well chosen to avoid any more than minor clearance of degraded vegetation. The total disturbance footprint is in the low and no rare or listed species will be impacted. Birds that frequent the area will move out of the way of the works during construction and the panels will not interfere with the birdlife during the operational phase of the power supply.

Conditions have been included to ensure that the impact from the works is reduced:

- All vehicles and construction equipment must be cleaned prior to entering Namadgi National Park and be free of weed and soil material.
- Movement of vehicles and machinery is to be limited to existing fire trails and access roads.

It has been determined that if the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the above conditions and the mitigation measures as provided in the documentation attached to the application for the ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.