

**A reply to Geoff Davies on the proposed solar farm
(As an SSPG member)**

I truly appreciate the opportunity to address the points raised in Dr Geoff Davies letter. As promised to Changing Times I will limit my comments to facts - and avoid innuendos and personal attacks. If anything I say here is demonstrably incorrect, or questions the good faith of anyone mentioned, I will publicly apologise in these pages.

Before commenting on the points raised in Geoff's article can I make two points crystal clear.

The Sane Solar Power Group is not anti-solar. Our objectives are to get the right type of solar farm in the right place (eg Dargues Mine), to maximise benefits and minimise risks in a way that is equitable to all. We believe these are relevant criteria to assess the specifics of this DA. I'll say it again. We are NOT anti-solar. But we do have reservations about this DA which is to be used as a template for rolling out near identical farms across regional NSW. That's a good reason for getting this model right in the first place.

Secondly, we are not a malign, conspiratorial, vested interest group in the secret employ of fossil fuel interests or any political party any more than BCE is the pawn of the renewables lobby or Green party. We formed our group after attending EDPR's/BCE's information night. That's not long ago. Our group expanded from those living near the 'remote' site selected to include people in the broader community. That we are not a clandestine group is evidenced by the fact over 350 + people have signed our petition with their names and/or made online comments. Anyone can view those comments on Change.org. We, as they, have nothing to hide.

As to the issues raised by Dr Davies I will answer them in the order he made them.

Claim 1. SSPG 'has chosen to oppose the project'.

Answer: We think THIS proposal has flaws, risks and omissions of significance that need addressing. Surely we have a right to express those concerns...aren't we (and people who share the same concerns) members of this community? If our concerns are ill founded, we'd welcome being told why by EDPR or BCE (or anyone for that matter). It would be a great relief to be reassured this proposed project is both sound and fair.

Claim 2. SSPG 'give...a quite unbalanced account of the project's benefits and a range of possible problems which are quite unlikely or fanciful'.

Answer:

(a) Our mail out cited facts to counter the many incorrect assumptions/expectations people have about this project; isn't debate sounder when based on facts, not hearsay or misconceptions?

(b) If Geoff uses the word 'unlikely' to mean lowish risk. We agree. But low risks are not to be ignored if the result of them happening is catastrophic. The Titanic was unsinkable until it sank. If a fire occurs in this high fire risk area the results could well be catastrophic for the farm's neighbours, the environment and the residents of Majors Creek. The same risk/damage logic applies to possible water pollution caused by a damaged Lithium battery. If any of these major events occurs who would pay for the damage? The State or Federal governments? QPRC? EDPR the developer? Ratepayers?...or the landowner whose own property would, by then, be worthless? There's nothing fanciful about those questions. To ignore them borders on wilful negligence.

If the developers are so confident that the risks we cite are insignificant why don't they take out insurance to pay for any damage caused by their business? If the actuarial risks are really low the premiums should be affordable. If EDPR committed to putting such insurances in place, it would allay many of our concerns.

Claim 3. SSPG 'skips over the main benefit (a resilient power supply) and misconstrues the reasons for this more limited arrangement. It is not because of greedy developers

Answer: We've never contested that a backup power supply is the main (if not the only tangible) benefit. The farm will be in back-up mode only a small % of time (2% to 5% as a generous guess). The rest of the time EDPR will, as a wholesaler, be selling its power into the grid - for a profit.

Claim 4. SSPG 'is concerned about increased risk of fires but they don't explain why....I've never heard of fires being started by a solar array'.

Answer: If you look at the history of 10,000+ solar panel with Lithium ion storage batteries farms (that's what they really are, not euphemistic 'arrays' or 'microgrids') you'll find fires have occurred. As we've been at pains to point out, Lithium batteries are well nigh impossible to put out. They cause thermal runaway, a situation that RFS brigades don't have the means to cope with. Nor does the community have the means to cope with the toxic chemicals that damaged batteries can release. Leakages into waterways can take decades to fix.

Claim 5. 'This project will not open the way for the countryside to be dotted with industrial projects'.

Answer: Currently 1A projects (which the proposed solar farm is) are not permitted in RU1 farmland areas. If the law is changed it will open the way for the same sort of farms being rolled out elsewhere. On the 21st of May, Ministers Bowen and McBain announced such a roll out is now Federal Government policy. That fact was revealed in BCE's own press release (May 20 2026).

Claim 6. 'The development Application submitted by EDPR specifically states that remediation would be undertaken as part of the project, which implies it would be paid for by the owners. This (SSPG) concern seems to have no basis'.

Answer: Remediation is a hot topic because it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. If no one fronts up, the cost of remediation falls on the landowner who often, hasn't the money. In these cases solar farms/batteries can and have turned into toxic, decaying tips of leaching chemicals. Developers can enter into pay-as-you-go-bonds etc to ensure the money is there for remediation. I addressed this question to EDPR on March 19. EDPR answered they have no such agreement in place.

Claim 7. 'EDPR clearly stated....that Braidwood residents could invest in the projectThere is nothing stopping local residents from forming a syndicate and taking some ownership'.

Answer: Yes. It's theoretically possible. But currently, EDPR is a Pty Ltd company where strict conditions are placed on the buying and selling of shares. I've heard it said the local community would have to raise a minimum of a million dollars before EDPR would consider a buy-in proposal. BCE knows more than anyone else about the likelihood of that happening.

Claim 8 'EDPR is part of a network of an international network of such companies....it is not an overseas group....'.

Answer: EDPR AUSTRALIA PTY LTD is wholly owned by EDP Renewables, the clean energy arm

of EDP (Energias de Portugal). Australians have no direct route to access equity in this company.

Claim 9. 'SSPG might enhance its credibility if its members had the courage to reveal themselves along with who has funded their campaign including a rather expensive mail out...'

Answer: Simple, we put our hands in our pockets to get a better result than the one on offer in a way that's fair to all members of the community. We have neither sought nor received funding from anyone. We are self-funding.

Claim 10. 'the only issue that seems to emerge clearly....is that some people do not want to be able to see the array'....(inferring that SSPG's concerns would disappear if)... 'the solar farm was in someone else's backyard'.

Answer: This is a variant of the old NIMBY slur. It implies that only the selfish could have reservations about such a flawless proposal, such a perfect DA from such a community minded company as EDPR, a company that never contacted the people who live in the area where they want to build their (not a community) plant. The people of Cobargo have expressed the same complaints as SSPG.

On Sunday May 10 NSW CWA passed motion AE11 at their annual conference - it called for the State government to review the solar farm approval process which it found is biased in favour of developers and dismissive of community consultation. Are the CWA in the pockets of international oil companies too?

Claim 11. Dr Davies called for evidence that land values fall when a solar farm is built nearby. There's plenty around. If he can't be bothered looking it up, he can just ask any real estate agent. There's NO case where land values have increased when a solar farm was built alongside.

Finally, Dr Davies claims there's been plenty of community consultation, many disagree. This whole approval process has been railroaded through with minimal consultation.

In conclusion - it is not divisive to discuss the pros and cons of such an important proposal. That's what real, mature communities do. That's how democracies are meant to work.

Tim Lenehan
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