

Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline

Frequently asked questions

November 2017

What is a large-scale solar energy project?

- Large-scale solar energy is any type of solar energy generation infrastructure, such as photovoltaic or concentrated solar thermal, that is State Significant Development under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.
- The State Environmental Planning Policy (State and Regional Development) 2011 defines any electricity generating development with a capital investment value of more than \$30 million as State Significant Development. If the project is in an environmentally sensitive area of state significance, this threshold is reduced to \$10 million.

Why is the NSW Government developing a Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline?

- Through the NSW Climate Change Policy Framework, the Government has an aspirational long-term objective of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. It is also committed to contributing to national and international targets related to emissions and renewable energy.
- Solar energy is a rapidly growing industry and the Government wants to ensure that clear guidance is provided to proponents and the community, to promote better development outcomes and to encourage the smooth integration of the solar industry into NSW regions.
- To support this, the Guideline has been developed to assist in the design, development and assessment of State significant solar energy projects.
- The Guideline will build the Government's renewable energy assessment framework, which commenced by the Wind Energy Guideline, published in December 2016

What is the scope of the Guideline?

- The Guideline is intended to apply to all development applications and modifications for State Significant solar energy projects.
- While the Guideline is not tailored to community or small scale solar developments, the principles and key assessment issues are similar, so it may also be of use to councils and Joint Regional Planning Panels for assessing local and regional scale solar developments.
- Small scale rooftop solar systems are usually treated as exempt or complying development under the State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007.

What does the Guideline do?

- The Guideline will drive better solar energy developments and encourage earlier and more effective engagement with local communities and councils.
- Strategic site selection is an important aspect of solar development. Solar developments are not as constrained by geography and geology as other types of development (e.g. mines and wind turbines). This means that sites can be strategically selected to avoid or mitigate many assessment issues, such as biodiversity or visual impacts, or land use conflict. This can help to minimise impacts on the local community and/or the environment and, as such, provide an easier path through the assessment system.
- Thorough and effective community engagement is a critical element for any major development. The Guideline highlights the importance of early community engagement to listen and respond to community concerns.

Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline

Frequently asked questions

November 2017

- By allowing early feedback to influence the design of the project, proponents may be able to work with the community to develop a project with strong social licence.

Where can large-scale solar infrastructure be developed?

- Large-Scale Solar Energy infrastructure can be developed on any land, with the exception of residential areas (prescribed residential zones- Infrastructure SEPP 2007). In these areas, only small-scale (no more than 100kW) photovoltaic electricity generating systems are permitted.
- The Guideline highlights the importance of site selection and outlines preferable conditions that help guide site selection. These include, but are not limited to, topography, neighbouring land use, road access, and community support. Constraining factors are also outlined including native vegetation, residential developments, high visibility site, and impacts on agricultural lands or mining.

Does the Guideline have a regulatory or legislative function?

- The Guideline is not enforced through legislation and it does not have a regulatory function. However, it does explain the regulatory assessment pathways that exist for large-scale solar energy developments.
- The issues outlined in the Guideline are consistent with the issues considered by the Department during development assessment and the consent authority during determination.
- The guideline outlines DPE's key assessment issues, but are indicative only. Project specific assessment issues will also be considered.

How does this effect current projects?

- The draft Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline will have no bearing on development applications that have already been lodged with the Department of Planning and Environment or to projects that already have planning approval.
- Further transitional arrangements are likely to be developed before the Guideline is finalised.

Does the Guideline cover transmission lines?

- In general, energy generating developments need to be connected to transmission lines to allow their energy to be distributed to consumers. Access to transmission lines is a key issue for solar energy proponents.
- The development of transmission lines is regulated under the State Environment Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007. If transmission lines are being developed by, or on behalf of, a network operator a separate approval pathway is required.
- However, the Guideline outlines that, whether or not transmission lines will be separately approved, the full project should be covered in a development application. This will ensure the whole project can be transparently assessed on its merits, rather than as separate approvals.

Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline

Frequently asked questions

November 2017

How do I comment on the proposal?

Submissions on the Exhibition of the Solar Energy Assessment Guidelines will close on 16 February 2018.

You can view and make a submission:

Online at planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals

You can make a submission by:

- o responding online at planning.nsw.gov.au/proposals, or
- o by mail to the Director, Industry and Infrastructure Policy, GPO Box 39, Sydney, NSW 2001

All submissions will be made public in line with the Department's objective to promote an open and transparent planning system. If you do not want your name published, please state this clearly at the top of your submission. Before making a submission, please read our privacy statement at: planning.nsw.gov.au/privacy

Where can I find out more?

Call on 1300 305 695.

If English isn't your first language, please call 131 450. Ask for an interpreter in your language and then request to be connected to our Information Centre on 1300 305 695.

Email information@planning.nsw.gov.au