

Community Consultation Meeting – Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Proposal

Date: Thursday 14th May 2026

Location: Community Hall

Subject: Proposed Battery Energy Storage System associated with existing solar factory development.

Attendees

- Representatives from Engie (the developer).
- Local residents and landholders
- CFA volunteers and brigade representatives
- Community leadership group members
- Local political representative/staff member
- Other interested community stakeholders

Meeting Minutes

1. Opening and Purpose of Meeting

- Engie (the developer) representatives outlined the purpose of the meeting:
 - To explain the proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).
 - To discuss the planning and approvals process.
 - To hear and document community concerns.
 - To continue community engagement prior to formal submission to the State Government.

2. Planning & Approval Process

Developer Overview

Engie (the developer) explained:

- The existing solar farm was approved separately through council planning processes.
- The battery proposal is being treated as a separate project and will proceed through State Government planning pathways.
- Council reportedly preferred the battery proposal be assessed by the State due to:
 - Limited local resources
 - Limited experience assessing BESS developments

Current Stage

- Project currently in “concept design” and draft assessment phase.
- Approximately 7 potential locations were initially investigated.
- 4 locations progressed to feasibility studies.
- Only 1 location was considered feasible primarily due to:

- Noise constraints
- Constructability
- Flooding
- Environmental impacts

Assessments Underway

The following assessments are currently being prepared:

- Noise assessment
- Ecological assessment
- Fire risk assessment
- Cultural heritage assessment
- Flood assessment
- Groundwater assessment
- Visual impact assessment
- Constructability assessment

Timeline

- Draft reports nearing completion.
- Engie (the developer) expects submission to State Government within approximately 4–6 weeks.
- State assessment process estimated at:
 - 3–4 months
 - Followed by public exhibition period (~28 days)

Further Stages

- If approved, detailed design phase would follow.
- Detailed design would require:
 - Further compliance evidence
 - Secondary approvals
 - Demonstration of compliance with all conditions

3. Community Concerns – Noise

Main Issues Raised

Community members expressed significant concern regarding:

- Continuous background hum/noise
- Impact on rural amenity and quiet environment
- Potential cumulative noise impacts with existing solar farm
- Night-time noise impacts
- Effect on nearby homes, livestock, and mental wellbeing

Discussion Points

Engie (the developer) stated:

- Noise limits are governed by EPA standards.
- ~34 dB at night (most restrictive)

- System will be designed to meet **worst-case (night-time) limits at all times**.
- Proposed system would be designed to comply with the strictest night-time limits.
- Existing solar farm inverter technology is already operating on site.
- Proposed battery inverters would use quieter equipment (SMA brand selected partly for lower noise output).
- Batteries are not expected to operate continuously at full output.
- Modelling currently indicates compliance with night-time limits.

Community Feedback

Residents requested:

- Better practical demonstrations/examples of expected noise
- Independent verification
- Additional education sessions
- Consideration of noise levels acceptable to the township, not only minimum legal compliance

4. Fire Risk & CFA Concerns

Major Community Concerns

Strong concerns were raised regarding:

- Battery fire risk
- Extreme bushfire conditions
- Toxic smoke/fumes
- CFA capability and preparedness
- Lack of local brigade consultation
- Potential escalation during grassfire conditions
- Water requirements for suppression
- Emergency access
- Impact on volunteer resources

CFA & Brigade Concerns

Local brigade representatives stated:

- Local CFA members currently have little/no formal information regarding the proposal.
- Concerns exist regarding:
 - Training
 - Emergency response capability
 - Staffing capacity
 - Understanding battery fire behaviour
- Existing volunteer brigades are already stretched during fire season.
- Local responders may be first on scene before specialist crews arrive.

Developer Responses

Engie (the developer) advised:

- BESS containers would include integrated fire detection and suppression systems.
- Vegetation exclusion zones would be maintained around equipment.
- Additional dedicated firefighting water storage would be required.
- Fire risk assessments are being undertaken by specialist consultants.
- Emergency management plans would be developed during detailed design stage.
- CFA would formally review plans during approval process.
- In a battery fire scenario, containment and prevention of propagation between containers is a major priority.

Community Suggestions

Suggestions included:

- Dedicated on-site trained personnel
- Additional local CFA training/support
- Operational shutdowns during extreme fire danger days
- Greater direct engagement with local brigades

5. Flooding & Water Management

Concerns Raised

Residents highlighted:

- Significant local flood history
- Existing overland flow paths through the site
- Rapid runoff from surrounding hill country
- Potential contamination risks from firefighting water or damaged battery systems
- Concerns that local knowledge had not previously been adequately considered during solar farm construction

Developer Responses

Engie (the developer) advised:

- Flood modelling and hydrology assessments are underway.
- Contaminated water containment systems would be required.
- Detailed drainage and containment design would occur during later design stages.
- Existing site data from the solar farm project is being used to inform design.

Community Feedback

Community members stressed:

- Importance of incorporating local flood knowledge
- Existing concerns with previous solar farm drainage outcomes
- Concerns regarding stormwater concentration and altered water movement

6. Trust, Consultation & Transparency

Community Sentiment

Several attendees expressed frustration and mistrust due to:

- Previous assurances that no battery project was planned
- Perceived lack of transparency during original solar farm development
- Concerns that information has changed over time

Developer Acknowledgement

Engie (the developer) acknowledged:

- Community trust concerns are valid
- Industry/economic conditions changed significantly after original solar farm approval
- Battery storage is now considered necessary for solar farm viability

Requests from Community

The community requested:

- Ongoing engagement
- Better communication
- Direct mail-outs rather than reliance on social media
- Smaller working-group style meetings
- Education-focused sessions
- Continued opportunities for questions before public exhibition

7. Renewable Energy Zone & Broader Concerns

Discussion included:

- Concerns regarding increasing industrialisation of farmland
- Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) planning
- Potential future transmission infrastructure
- Broader cumulative impacts of renewable developments across the district

A political representative present advised:

- Current Liberal Party policy position includes review/pause of REZ and transmission projects if elected.
- Petition efforts regarding REZ consultation are ongoing.

8. Potential Community Benefits

Engie (the developer) noted potential benefits including:

- Community benefit funding
- Local employment opportunities during construction
- Use of local contractors and businesses

- Infrastructure improvements

Community members requested clearer information regarding:

- Tangible long-term local benefits
- How benefits would directly assist the township and district

9. Agreed Outcomes / Next Steps

Developer Commitments

- Continue consultation with community group.
- Hold further drop-in/information sessions.
- Provide clearer documentation and educational material.
- Continue refining assessments.
- Consider local feedback during ongoing design process.

Community Requests

- Additional detailed information on:
 - Noise
 - Fire management
 - Flooding
 - Toxicity
 - Emergency response
- Greater CFA engagement
- Improved transparency and communication

Proposed Follow-Up

- Further meeting proposed in approximately 10 days / early June.
- Continued engagement prior to formal submission to State Government.

Meeting Close

Meeting concluded following agreement that:

- Community concerns remain significant.
- Further education and engagement are required.
- Ongoing dialogue between Engie (the developer) and the Community is necessary prior to formal planning progression.