

PROPOSED BALLANTINE SOLAR FARM

NOVEMBER 2024 – COMMUNITY UPDATE 2



Elgin, an international solar and energy storage company is proposing a new solar farm and battery energy storage system (Ballantine Solar Farm) at 280 Bengworden Road, Bairnsdale.

On 2 November 2024, Elgin hosted a community information session to answer questions and hear feedback on the proposal. This community update provides responses to the most frequently asked questions.

Elgin is committed to providing the community with transparent and clear information and responding to feedback.





Founded in 2009, Elgin is a leading international solar and storage company with offices in Sydney, London, Dublin and Munich. Elgin's specialist teams manage each phase of renewable energy projects from origination through development and operation. Since being established, the Elgin team has grown from the four founders to over 100 employees.

Elgin operates across Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Germany. Elgin has a pipeline of over 150 solar and storage projects, which will provide 15 GW of clean, renewable energy. This is enough green energy to power over 11 million homes.



Will Elgin consider covering costs (such as insurance premiums or lost earnings) for adjoining neighbours as a result of the construction or operations of the proposed solar farm?

If planning approval is granted for the Ballantine Solar Farm, this will require Elgin to meet a range of requirements that minimise the impacts of both construction and operations on adjoining neighbours.

These requirements, known as conditions of approval, cover issues such as the management of traffic, dust suppression, noise, and construction hours. If Elgin does not adhere to these conditions, fines or shutdown orders may apply.

In a recent public statement, specific to farm insurance, the Insurance Council of Australia noted it is not aware of any instances where its members have been unable to provide insurance or have increased premiums as a result of a farm or residential property hosting or being located near energy infrastructure.

Like all insurance, farm insurance premiums have risen in recent years due to the increased number and severity of natural disasters and escalating costs associated with recovery and rebuilding.

(Source: Insurance Council of Australia 'Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure', May 2024)



How will the proposed solar farm benefit the community?

Elgin is working closely with East Gippsland Shire Council to design a community benefit fund so that it best meets the needs of local communities. Elgin will invest in the community benefit fund for the life of the project. The amount invested in the fund will be negotiated with Council and held in a trust, and is invested in projects and initiatives informed by the community and Council.



Are there examples of solar farms near residences, like the proposal for Ballantine?

Solar farms have been located near or adjacent to residences in Australia. Technical assessments are carried out as part of the planning process to ensure that any impacts on neighbouring residences during construction: and operations are reduced and managed effectively.



How will potential visual impacts be managed?

On its other projects in Australia, Elgin has worked closely with adjoining landowners to design landscaping that screens views of the solar farm.

For this project, Elgin has engaged experts to conduct a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which will evaluate potential impacts on local character and visual appearance for adjoining landowners. Elgin is committed to working with adjoining landowners to address any visual impacts. Elgin has done this on other projects.



Will there be glint and glare from the solar panels?

Solar panels are generally designed to absorb sunlight rather than reflect it. Panels are designed using a dark, non-reflective coating on the panels. Angling the panels minimises light reflection.

Elgin has engaged specialists to prepare a Visual Impact Assessment and Glint and Glare Assessment. Part of this is to assess and address any potential impacts to near neighbours, including the Bairnsdale Airport. Elgin is consulting with East Gippsland Shire Council and the Aerodrome Coordinator to ensure that any impact to the airport during the construction and operation of the proposed solar farm is mitigated.



What will the impact be to the local road network?

A Traffic Impact Assessment will be conducted to manage any impacts on the local road network during construction and operation of the solar farm. If road upgrades are needed, we will work with Council to minimise any impacts on neighbouring residents. Construction and operational traffic will only enter the site from Bengworden Road, not residential roads.



How will potential impacts on ecology and wildlife be considered?

The proposed site has been modified from its original agricultural use and has little remaining native vegetation. Elgin is doing technical assessments on what impact there may be to the ecology and wildlife on the site and will mitigate any potential impacts. The planning process requires a proponent to consider these impacts in the design of the solar farm. On other projects, Elgin has been very proactive in identifying risks to biodiversity and responding through significant design changes. For example, in Victoria, Elgin identified an endangered Black Falcon nest on another project site. In response, Elgin significantly revised its proposal and established a habitat corridor to protect local wildlife.



Will agriculture be protected?

Elgin is exploring the opportunity for ongoing sheep grazing on the Ballantine Solar Farm site. The sheep will help maintain the grass on site and the solar panels will provide protection to the sheep during harsh weather events. The proposed site will be surrounded by a security fence, which will protect livestock. The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) itself will also be surrounded by a security fence to prevent any livestock from coming into contact with it.



Will the solar farm impact the silver eel migration?

Elgin has commissioned a specialist assessment of the short and long finned eel, known as the silver eel. The assessment concluded that the short and long finned eel are widespread in the East Gippsland area and do not only occur in the proposed site. Neither of these eels are listed under Victorian or federal legislation as protected species. To mitigate any potential impact to the eel, any alteration to water flow through the property will be carefully considered and earthworks will be done in dry weather. These details of the assessment will be included in the planning application being lodged with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and will be available for the community to view and comment on during public advertisement of the plans.



How will fire risk be managed?

The proposed solar farm is required to meet the highest fire safety standards, following Country Fire Authority (CFA) guidelines. Safety measures which will be included on the site are cleared vegetation zones, fire breaks, water access, and a vegetation management plan to control weeds. BESS temperatures will be monitored, and the unit automatically turns off if it exceeds safe temperature limits.



How will Elgin manage the decommissioning of the solar farm to avoid waste and restore agricultural land use?

The proposed solar farm is designed to operate for up to 50 years. Solar panels are generally replaced after approximately 25 years. Wherever possible and practicable, materials removed from the site would be either re-used or recycled in accordance with the project's waste management strategy. It is illegal to dispose of solar PV panels in landfill in Victoria. Additionally, solar farms are considered to have no long-term impact on ongoing agricultural use of land. While some infrastructure will remain in place after decommissioning, the majority of the site will be available for agricultural or other land use after the solar farm ceases operating.

NEXT STEPS

Elgin is continuing to work through its technical analysis for the proposed solar farm.

Elgin will finalise and formally lodge its Planning Application to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) in early 2025.

The community will be notified of the public advertisement period, during which time the community can review all planning application documents and make formal submissions.

The DTP will likely make a decision on the planning application in mid 2025. Elgin will communicate the outcome to adjoining landowners and the community.



ABOUT ELGIN

Elgin Energy (Elgin) is a leading solar and storage development company, committed to and working towards a zero-carbon future.

Elgin's purpose is to deliver renewable energy projects that create a positive impact for both the communities it operates in and the broader public.

PROVIDE YOUR FEEDBACK

Share your feedback and ideas with us directly

Elgin is committed to providing clear, timely information and opportunities for community feedback to shape the proposal. To facilitate this, Elgin has appointed Urbis to gather your feedback and provide more information.

You can contact Urbis Engagement via:

 ballantine@urbis.com.au

 1800 016 818

