

Weasel Solar Farm

Frequently Asked Questions

PROJECT

What is Weasel Solar Farm?

Weasel Solar Farm is a large-scale solar project with potential capacity up to 250MW. It will be accompanied by a battery energy storage system (BESS) and associated electricity infrastructure (such as inverters, switchyard, and substation) to facilitate connection into the existing 220kV transmission line.

The project includes land for construction, maintenance, and operation of the solar farm, new access tracks and upgrades to existing tracks, laydown areas, security infrastructure, and landscaping.

The solar farm will be constructed to enable the continued use of the land for grazing sheep underneath the solar panels, known as 'agrisolar.'

Central Highlands Council approved the project (Planning Permit DA 2025/14) at its Council Meeting on Tuesday, 15 July 2025. The planning permit contains a range of conditions that the project must adhere to, as detailed in the Council Agenda, which can be viewed on the Council's website or at the Council offices.

How much land will the solar farm cover?

The total development area of the solar farm comprises approximately 435 hectares, including internal transmission corridors. Of that, approximately 270 hectares will be solar arrays.

Who is developing and funding the project?

The Downie family from Dungrove and the Bowden family from Weasel Plains are working in partnership with Andrew Clark from Alternate Path to develop Weasel Solar Farm.

Together, this partnership brings two decades of experience in renewable energy development, including the successful Cattle Hill Wind Farm, located on the eastern shore of Lake Echo.

As established local families, they are committed to sensitively considering the environmental and cultural values of the area. The overall vision is to use renewable energy alongside agricultural and forestry practices to generate real and lasting social and economic benefits for Bothwell, surrounding landowners and the state of Tasmania.

Alternative Path and the Downie family have partnered with Gamuda, to co-develop and construct Weasel Solar Farm and Cellar Hill Wind Farm (if approved).

Gamuda is a global engineering, property and infrastructure company with an excellent track record of delivering world-class major projects. The company's core business focuses on infrastructure design, engineering, construction, operation and maintenance across rail, roads, bridges, tunnelling, water management, transmission and renewable energy.

Gamuda is part of the Gamuda Group of Companies. Collectively, this group has operated in Australia for over a decade, employing a team of over 2,300+ people across six Australian states and delivering over 50 projects nationally.

Gamuda is committed to continuing the landowner-led principles of the portfolio, which will be delivered in partnership with the Downie Family and Alternate Path.



Whilst Gamuda will bring important technical and engineering skills to the project team, from the outside, the project will continue as in a business-as-usual manner, including its strong commitment to engagement and community benefit sharing.

What makes the Weasel Plains location suitable to host solar panels?

The project is suitably located within the Central Highlands Renewable Energy Zone and benefits from being adjacent to existing 220 kV transmission line infrastructure. This means that there is no need to build new transmission lines, minimising impacts on the local landscape.

The project's central location to Hobart and Launceston will also ensure there is a reduction in the cost of transmission compared to other sites. A solar farm will both contribute to Australia's energy transition, but also assist in strengthening existing local industries such as forestry.

Is there enough sunlight to generate sufficient electricity?

Feasibility studies indicate that while Weasel Solar Farm will be the most southern solar farm in Australia, summer daylight hours extend longer than in the north and during peak usage hours nationally.

A solar farm of this size would generate renewable electricity equivalent to powering over 30,000 homes and contribute to Tasmania's Renewable Energy Target (TRET) for a carbon-neutral future.

How will Weasel Solar Farm connect to the energy grid?

The project includes electricity infrastructure, including inverters and a switchyard containing an electrical substation to connect to the existing 220kV transmission.

Connecting to the existing 220 kV transmission line running through the site avoids the need to develop new transmission lines. The additional electricity infrastructure will help ensure grid connection to the National Energy Market (NEM).

Will the property continue to be used for agriculture?

Yes, the solar farm is being located, designed and constructed in collaboration with established grazing practices. Both families are committed to living on and working the land for future generations. The land would continue to be managed as a mixed grazing property, with a commitment to improving the health of soil and pastures, pest control and biodiversity. Grazing sheep on pastures underneath solar panels is known as 'agrisolar', and can have multiple co-location benefits, for the sheep and pastures.

PLANNING & DESIGN

What is the planning permit process and timeline?

The Central Highlands Council is the Planning Authority and must assess the Development Application (DA) against the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. The Planning Scheme includes zoning and code criteria that must be adhered to, with considerations on built form, ecology, hydrology, fire risk, infrastructure adequacy, economic impact, and public notice.

The DA for Weasel Solar Farm was lodged with Council at the end of September 2024 and was advertised for community feedback in late October 2024. The DA that was submitted included detailed plans, environmental impact assessments, and any other required documentation.

The Council makes a decision to approve, conditionally approve, or reject the application based on its alignment with planning regulations. This decision can be appealed by the applicant or objectors to the Resource and Planning Stream of TASCAT.

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project must adhere to, as detailed in the Council Agenda, which can be viewed on the Council's website or at the Council offices.

When will construction start and for how long?

The construction period would be expected to take approximately 1-1.5 years. Construction could commence in 2026, with operations expected to begin in 2027.

Construction traffic will use Highland Lakes Road, with Weasel Plains Road the primary site access point.

What are the potential impacts of the project?

Weasel Solar Farm will create local jobs for the Central Highlands region and support the Tasmania's net-zero transition. Combined with other energy projects in the region, it will contribute to a burgeoning regional employment sector.

The careful planning and construction of the solar farm will ensure that the local ecosystem is preserved, demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship while driving forward Tasmania's clean energy future.

As part of this, the project team is completing a range of assessments and studies to ensure the plans for the solar farm avoid or minimise impacts on biodiversity, cultural heritage, noise, landscape character and visual amenity. Overall, large solar farms can be very low risk, and those potential localised impacts can be addressed through careful design.

How will views of the solar panels be minimised for neighbouring properties?

While most of the surrounding area is quite undulating, the areas selected for the solar farm development are relatively flat and hidden from public view because of a small crestline running parallel to Highland Lakes Road. There may be some limited visual exposure to neighbouring properties, although the nature of the site, more than 9 km from Bothwell and with very few residences in the vicinity, makes it a highly suitable location.

The project has sought to reduce any potential impact by early identification and exclusion of areas that pose the greatest visual impact and cannot be screened, broadly maintaining the established woodland vegetation, and proposing new vegetation screening around the property at specific sight lines.

How will Weasel Solar Farm benefit the local economy?

The project vision is to use renewable energy alongside agricultural and forestry practices to generate significant social and economic benefits for the Bothwell community, surrounding landowners and the state of Tasmania.

Weasel Solar Farm will generate employment opportunities for local and regional communities. Additionally, the project is expected to provide chances for local businesses to get involved during the construction phase and will promote the growth of new industries to support local economic development.

The key economic impacts anticipated for this project include:

- More than 300 direct jobs during construction
- Approximately 8 direct ongoing jobs during operation
- Opportunities for training and development within the renewable energy industry
- Delivery of more affordable and secure electricity, with a capacity equivalent to powering approximately 30,000 Tasmanian homes.

CONSULTATION & COMMUNITY

Who has been consulted about the proposed solar farm?

A detailed Community & Stakeholder Engagement Plan was prepared to ensure stakeholders are informed and consulted at key phases of the process.

A priority of the project team was to seek early neighbour feedback and input into the concept design of the solar farm.

Since 2023, the project team have been corresponding with neighbours who are either adjacent to or overlooking the developable areas of the Weasel Plains and Dungrove properties.

The project team has also met with local members of parliament to brief them on Weasel Solar Farm. Should parliamentary members receive any contact from the community about the project, we have encouraged them to direct enquiries to the project team.

Who can I speak to about the project?

The project team is available to speak with you if you have questions or feedback via consultation@cogencyaustralia.com.au or on 0452 593 428.

How and when will updates about the project be provided?

During pre-construction and construction, the project team expects to provide project updates at regular intervals when milestones are reached. The website will continue to be updated as the project moves through construction and operation.

What neighbour benefit sharing could be offered with this type of project?

The project team is committed to ensuring that Weasel Solar Farm directly contributes to the long-term prosperity and wellbeing of the Bothwell community.

The project team is currently investigating the potential of providing funding to the local Tasmania Fire Service (TFS). The project could support the local fire brigade by allocating a portion of its revenue to fund essential equipment, training, and facilities. This sort of community benefit sharing initiative would ensure enhanced emergency response capabilities, promoting safety and resilience within the local community.

ENVIRONMENT

Will the solar farm affect local waterways?

Water resources are critically important to the sustainability of local farm enterprises. Hydrological modelling has been undertaken to understand potential flood risk across the properties, so that the design can avoid areas that are subject to severe flooding. Avoiding flood-prone areas will protect infrastructure and waterways. Similarly, areas of potential erosion will be considered and managed/avoided.

Rain and water run-off from solar panels do not impact water quality, and sheep grazing operations can continue underneath. The battery will be appropriately located and designed to avoid flood risk. The project will make sure that firefighting and water quality management needs are met.

Will the solar farm affect local flora and fauna?

The areas selected for development of the solar farm are relatively cleared of vegetation, with large patches of native vegetation within the wider property being avoided. The solar farm will be primarily located on already disturbed or modified land, such as areas currently used for grazing, rather than on areas with high ecological value.



Consequently, the development will not impact significant environmental values. An ecology study was undertaken to identify native vegetation types and listed species in the area and assist in designing to avoid them. The assessment demonstrates that no significant fauna species or their habitats are found in the development area, ensuring minimal ecological impact.

Do solar farms increase fire risk?

Solar farms do not increase fire risk when properly planned and managed. A Bushfire Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the Development Application and a Bushfire Emergency Management Strategy has been drawn up to mitigate any risks in the future.

Will the project impact the visual amenity of the local landscape?

The site is situated well outside Bothwell and other rural towns. Notably, the areas selected for the solar farm development are relatively flat and hidden from public view, due to a crestline parallel to Highland Lakes Road. Furthermore, there are areas of woodland on the crest further hiding or obscuring the site. Overall, the project is likely to have minimal visual exposure.

Will the solar panels generate glare?

The solar panels are designed with anti-reflective coatings to minimise glare. While some reflection may occur, it is significantly reduced compared to other surfaces. The placement and angle of the panels will be further designed to mitigate any potential glare. Given the site characteristics and location, there is no expected impact upon nearby residents. Existing vegetation along the western boundary of the site will largely shield the solar farm from views along Highlands Lakes Road.

SOLAR TECHNOLOGY

What is the lifespan of a solar farm?

Typical solar farm operation periods are 30-40 years, subject to lease arrangements. Replacement of solar panel modules and extension of lease (lifespan) can be altered.

Do solar farms generate energy on cloudy or cold days?

Solar panels generate energy even in cloudy or cold conditions. Although cloudy weather may reduce power generation by as much as 45%, substantial energy can still be generated during those conditions. In most instances, cold temperatures do not reduce electricity output at all – and increase solar panel efficiency by increasing voltage.

What is renewable energy?

Renewable energy is clean energy generated from natural resources that are abundant and are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed, even if their availability depends on the time of day or weather. These resources include solar, wind, and hydro power.

On the other hand, fossil fuels such as coal, gas, and oil are non-renewable resources that take millions of years to form and be replenished. When burned, these fossil fuels produce harmful greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants, which heavily contribute to global warming.

Why should renewable energy be generated?

To mitigate the escalating impacts of climate change and achieve emissions reduction targets, substantial changes to the energy sector are essential. Weasel Solar Farm and the uptake of other renewable energy projects are crucial for fostering a more sustainable, resilient, and liveable future.

How does solar generation work?

Solar generation works by converting sunlight into electricity using photovoltaic (PV) cells made of semiconductor materials like silicon. When sunlight hits these cells, it creates an electric current. Multiple PV cells form a solar panel, and several panels make up a solar array.

The generated electricity is direct current (DC) and is converted into alternating current (AC) by an inverter for use in homes and businesses. This electricity can be fed into the grid or stored in batteries. Monitoring systems track performance, and regular maintenance ensures optimal operation. Solar generation provides clean, renewable energy, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.