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REASONS FOR DECISION UNDER *ENVIRONMENT EFFECTS ACT 1978* (REFERRAL NUMBER 2022-R05)

Proponent

RES Australia Pty Ltd

Project

Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project

Description

The Project is located in north-west Victoria on the lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk first nations people, 16 km north-east of Stawell. The project comprises of up to 47 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a maximum blade tip height of 255 m, up to 170 ha of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and a battery storage energy system (BESS) facility to cover approximately 12 ha. The project site covers an area of about 5,200 ha.

The project has an anticipated operational life of 30 years, after a 27 month construction period. Further associated infrastructure includes approximately 60 km of access tracks, on-site substations, approximately 600 m overhead 220 kV connection to existing Bulgana substation, approximately 65 km of on-site underground cabling, operational and maintenance facilities, meteorological mast, as well as potential on-site borrow pits.

Decision

The Minister for Planning has decided that an environment effects statement (EES) is not required for the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project, as described in the referral accepted on 11 August 2022, subject to the following conditions.

- a) An **environment report** must be prepared in consultation with DELWP and completed to the satisfaction of the Minister for Planning. The report needs to examine and document the following.
 - i. The existing conditions and predicted impacts (direct and indirect), on native vegetation and biodiversity values, in particular:
 - avifauna (Swift Parrot, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl and Eastern Bent-wing Bat) and other relevant fauna and flora species and communities listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*;
 - native vegetation patches, large trees and large hollow-bearing trees; and
 - waterways and groundwater dependant ecosystems.
 - ii. The assessment of alternatives, including project layout and siting of infrastructure, as well as mitigation measures, to further avoid, minimise and offset adverse environmental effects on matters listed in condition (a)(i).
 - iii. Potential cumulative impacts of the proposal together with nearby existing and known proposed windfarms and other infrastructure on biodiversity values, particularly in relation to values mentioned in condition (a)(i).

- iv. The environment report completed to the satisfaction of the Minister for Planning is to inform the proposed project to be considered through planning and approval processes, including the development of relevant management plans.

Reasons for Decision:

- There is potential for significant effects to some biodiversity values, particularly associated with the removal of native vegetation, large trees, risks to potential groundwater dependant ecosystems and waterways. This includes the potential for impacts to habitat, including fragmentation, and potential for collision and cumulative impacts for some listed species such as the Swift Parrot, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl and Eastern Bent Wing Bat.
- Aside from potential adverse effects on biodiversity values, the environment effects of the project are unlikely to have the significance or complexity to warrant an environment effects statement.
- The conditions set out through this decision provide the most appropriate means for examining the uncertainties for the limited scope of potentially significant effects that may occur as a result of the delivery of the project.
- Other potential adverse effects of the project are more understood and will be readily addressed through other existing statutory requirements under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, *Heritage Act 2017*, *Water Act 1989*, *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* and *Environment Protection Act 2017*.

Date 26/10/2022