

Malabar Resources' Maxwell Solar Farm given approval by NSW government

- Cody Tsaousis



NEW BEGINNINGS: The former Drayton open-cut coal mine site will now be used for the Maxwell Solar Farm.

MALABAR Resources have welcomed the New South Wales Government's decision to approve the planning of the 25 megawatt Maxwell Solar Farm.

The project, which has a plus 30 year life-span and will generate enough electricity to supply approximately 10,000 NSW homes, has received the go-ahead following a rigorous planning assessment process and the comprehensive review of independent expert reports on environmental, economic, and social impacts.

It will be located around 10 kilometres south-east of Muswellbrook, and is set to employ roughly 50 construction jobs and two operational jobs.

Quite symbolically, it will be placed on a 130 hectare section of the old Drayton open cut mine site, which closed in 2016.

With the farm set to produce an annual energy generation of 60 GWh, Malabar Resources chairman Wayne Seabrook said it's a major boost for the local area.

"It's great to see the NSW Government getting behind our innovative and creative approach to using this land," he said.

"The Maxwell Solar Project is another example of our commitment to the local area, the local economy and, above all, to co-exist with a wide range of industries and activities."

More than 50,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year are expected to be saved as a result of project, which will boast around 125,000 solar panels.

The Solar Farm will connect to the network via either an existing substation located on the Maxwell Infrastructure site, or via the construction of a new transmission line to connect to the network.

Construction is tipped to begin within six months, and will be the latest in an increasingly long line of renewable projects in the region that are utilising old mining sites.

This is pleasing to federal Hunter MP Joel Fitzgibbon, who has long stated the region needs to lessen its dependency on mining, despite his assertion coal still has a future in the area.

"The approval is a welcome thing, we will need more renewables and gas in the system as coal-fired generators run out of puff," he said.

"Gas will be critical to keeping the grid stable as the amount of renewable energy entering the system grows.

"That's why I welcome AGL's plans for new gas, battery and pumped hydro facilities in the Hunter."

In a rare showing of solidarity, this sentiment was shared by Upper Hunter MP Michael Johnsen.

However, while Mr Fitzgibbon continues to push strongly for gas, his state politics counterpart has an additional focus in mind.

"It demonstrates our energy resources' need to be diversified and not reliant on any particular source, now lets' continue our push to nuclear," he stated.

Solar farms are becoming increasingly popular in the Muswellbrook region, with a development application for the Denman Solar Park currently lodged with Muswellbrook Shire Council.