

Summary of reasons for decision – request to amend a referred proposal under s. 38C of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*

Proposal title: Uaroo Renewable Energy Hub

Date request to amend referred proposal under s. 38C received: 02-05-2022

Proponent: Pilbara Energy (Generation) Pty Ltd

Proposal referral date: 31-01-2022

Existing referred proposal:

The Proposal is to construct and operate a renewable energy generation project in the Pilbara, to power the Fortescue Metals Group mining operations.

The Proposal will consist of up to 340 wind turbines and a solar farm which will have a maximum energy generation capacity of 5.4GW. The Proposal also includes a battery energy storage system, substations, associated supporting infrastructure, a series of tracks and roads to provide access and corridors for electrical cabling.

The Proposal is located approximately 120 km south of Onslow and 170 km west of the FMG operated Eliwana Mine Site in the Shire of Ashburton and in the Thalanyji Native Title Determination Area, on land used predominantly for cattle grazing.

Short description of amendment sought:

The proposed amendment is primarily to include the construction and operation of a transmission line spanning 225km to connect the renewable energy generation infrastructure to the Eliwana iron ore mine.

The proposed amendment also incorporates a slight reduction in the disturbance area for roads, tracks and service corridors within the original Uaroo Renewable Energy Hub referral.

The above changes result in a change in the development envelope (DE), and indicative disturbance footprint (IDF), as summarised below:

	Uaroo Renewable Energy Hub (generation infrastructure)	Transmission line	Combined
DE	61,525 ha	14,337 ha	75,862 ha
IDE	10,015 ha <i>16.3 % of DE</i>	408 ha <i>2.8% of DE</i>	10,424 ha <i>13.7% of DE</i>

As part of the amended referral, the proponent also identified an opportunity to incorporate localised hydrogen generation facilities to fuel site vehicles and reduce reliance on diesel during future operations.

Decision:

Amendment to proposal as set out in attachment 1 is approved

Environmental factors relevant to amendment(s):

- Flora and vegetation: clearing of native vegetation
- Terrestrial fauna: loss of potential habitat for conservation significant fauna
- Inland waters: impacts to natural surface water regimes
- Social surroundings: impacts to Aboriginal heritage sites

Summary of likely changes to environmental impacts from proposed amendment

Amendment sought	Changes to environmental impacts
<p>Increase to DE and proposed disturbance area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in disturbance by 143 ha for roads associated with energy generation infrastructure (from 10,158 to 10,015 ha); • An additional disturbance of 408 ha associated with the proposed energy transmission line; • An additional 14,337 ha to the DE associated with the proposed energy transmission line. 	<p>The proposed changes do not alter the key environmental factors likely to be impacted by the proposal (flora and vegetation, terrestrial fauna, inland waters and social surrounds), which will be considered in the EPA’s decision on whether or not to assess the proposal.</p> <p>The proposed changes are likely to increase impacts to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flora and vegetation - Terrestrial fauna - Inland waters - Social surrounds <p>In all cases, increases in impacts may be significant, and further information will be obtained during the assessment process. Its noted that the additional disturbance makes up up 2.8% of the DE and the flexibility afforded by the wider DE will allow the proponent to optimise disturbance locations and minimise impacts, subject to the results of further survey investigations.</p> <p>It should be noted that the s.38C application ensures that the proposal will be considered in its entirety.</p>
<p>Proposed addition of packaged hydrogen generation plants with air-to-water technology for fuelling site vehicles</p>	<p>The potential inclusion of package hydrogen generation plants is a minor change and does not result in change to disturbance or water usage (groundwater abstraction) due to the use of air-to-water technology.</p>

Summary of consultation

Consultation completed by the proponent to date (and ongoing) regarding the transmission line and its alignment has included EPA Services, Buurabalayji Thalanyji Aboriginal Corporation and Thalanyji Traditional Custodians, Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura Traditional Custodians, Mt Stuart Pastoralists, Main Roads WA and underlying and adjacent tenement holders.

The original referral was advertised from 9th to 15th February 2022. The omission of the transmission line from the original referral was highlighted by some respondents and the

proposed change under s.38C addresses these comments. Re-advertising is unlikely to result in a change to the EPAs decision whether to assess and the associated level of assessment.

Summary of consideration of amendment

The EPA has considered whether, if the proposal were already approved, the amendment would be a significant amendment. This has included considering the likely significance of:

- Effects of the proposed amendment on its own
- Effects of the proposed amendment in the context of the existing referred proposal
- Cumulative environmental impacts
- Holistic impacts

The EPA has considered whether it has sufficient information about the proposed amendment to be able to make a decision whether to assess the proposal as amended, and if so, to decide the level of assessment.

The EPA has considered whether the amended proposal will still be substantially the same character as the existing referred proposal.

Approval – may be a significant amendment but can proceed to assessment decision

The proposed changes will increase the impacts to flora and vegetation, terrestrial fauna, inland waters and social surrounds; however the inclusion of the transmission infrastructure and footprint is a necessary change to ensure the proposal being referred is a complete proposal and that all relevant information will be presented during assessment to enable the true environmental effects of the proposal to be understood.

The EPA considers the amended proposal to be substantially the same character as the existing referred proposal. The EPA considers that the amendment may be a significant amendment if the proposal were already approved, but that the EPA has enough information to reasonably proceed to make decisions about assessment without a new referral being submitted.

Attachments

- Amended proposal content document

Appeals: Decision not appealable.



Prof. Matthew Tonts

CHAIR

Delegate of the Environmental Protection Authority

Date: 18 May 2022