



Queensland company lodges plan to build Australia's biggest solar farm near Gympie

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BY BRUCE ATKINSON

The proposed solar farm at Gympie could be expanded to power 315,000 homes.

A company proposing to build Australia's largest solar farm near Gympie says the \$2 billion facility will eventually supply about 15 per cent of south-east Queensland's power needs.

Queensland company Solar Q has lodged a development application with the Gympie Council to build a solar farm and battery storage facility 30 kilometres north-west of the city.

The project will be built in stages, with initial approval being sought for a 350-megawatt facility, but within four years it is proposed to increase this to 800 megawatts or enough electricity to power about 315,000 homes.

Managing director Scott Armstrong said the finished facility would be the biggest in Australia but "the way the market is going is that there will be bigger projects that will come on".

"To give you an idea of size, at ultimate design it will provide around 15 per cent of south-east Queensland's energy requirements from both the solar panels and the 4,000 megawatt hours of energy storage," Mr Armstrong said.

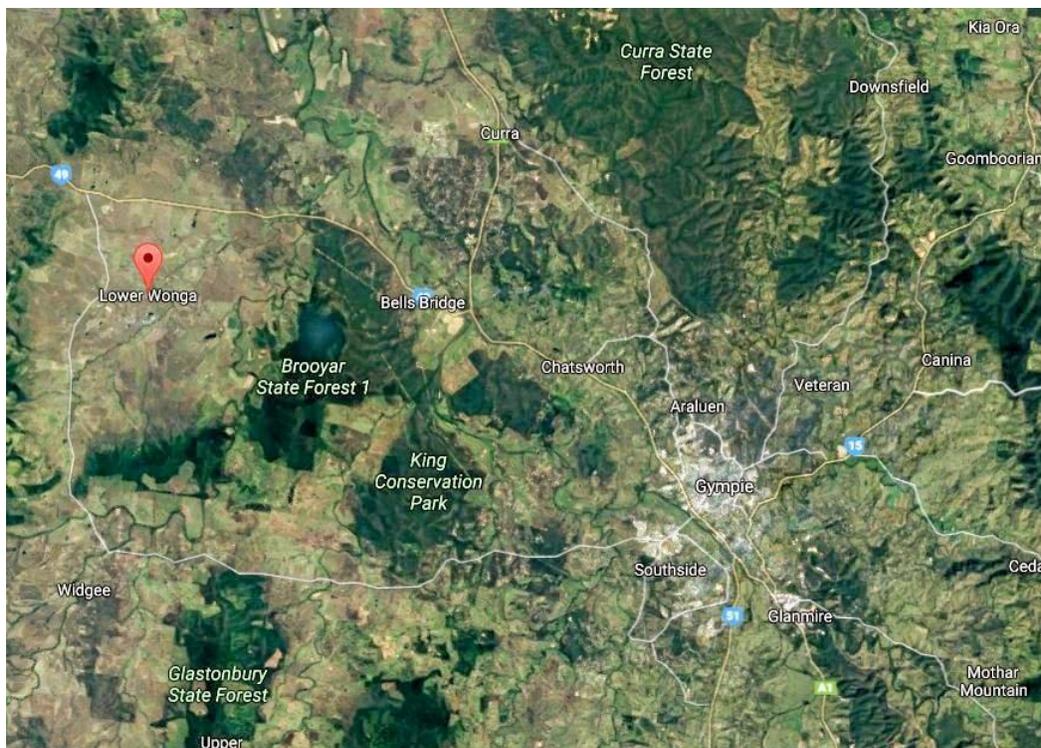
He said the solar farm would supply power to the electricity grid via an existing substation at Lower Wonga.

"That sub-station will actually feed energy to Kilkivan, Gympie and Palmwoods on the Sunshine Coast," he said.

"It will cover the Caboolture, Beerwah areas and also feed into north Brisbane and it also has a capability of feeding north back up into Gin Gin, back up into Central Queensland so it is a significant connection point."

When completed, around 3 million solar panels will provide power to the network on the 17-square-kilometre site.

During peak consumption at night, the battery storage facility, which is powered by the grid, will ease the load on power stations.



Council optimistic of project go-ahead

Gympie Mayor Mick Curran said, to his knowledge, it was the most significant project ever planned for the region and would create 450 jobs during construction.

"This project is subject to council and state approvals so there are a few hoops to go through before the sod is actually turned on this project," Cr Curran said.

"But with the liaison that has occurred between this company and our town planners there doesn't appear to be any great hurdles to overcome.

"I would certainly look forward personally to seeing all of those approvals come to fruition."

The proponents are not expecting any hurdles to approval from the Gympie Council or State Government agencies, Mr Armstrong said.

"Solar and battery storages are a static generation facility so it will produce minimal noise, it doesn't emit, it doesn't have particulates from chimney stacks, it doesn't have ash dams, so we are not expecting any impediments with regards to getting approvals," he said.

Once the approvals are in place Mr Armstrong expects the connection agreement with the transmission company will be finalised.

He said the project would be funded by private investors, including superannuation management funds.

Work is expected to start by the end of the year.

Australian Solar Council chief executive John Grimes said the largest solar farm currently in Australia was 150 megawatts.

"In global terms, an 800 megawatt solar farm is very significant," he said.

"It won't be the largest in the world.

"There are some of 1,000 megawatts being developed overseas but this is a very significant announcement for Queensland and the world."