

Solar farm debate

## NEWS

# Hot topic: Plans for solar farm split village



by [JANINE WATSON](#)

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A PROPOSED \$15-million solar farm at Nana Glen is causing friction in the small community. Property owners on either side of Ferretts Rd have agreed to lease sections of land for the farm, which will include approximately 50,000 solar panels across 53 hectares. The location has been chosen due to its proximity to a voltage substation.



The development application is set to go before Coffs Harbour City Council for approval in coming weeks.

Picture: TREVOR VEALE

The proponent (Rio Indygen) is seeking approval to operate the farm for up to 25 years, after which all above-ground components would be removed and the land restored to its former agricultural potential.

Chris Montgomery lives on Ferretts Rd and if the development goes ahead he will have rows of panels on either side of his property.



Residents meet with The Advocate to protest the Sydney-based company's development plans.

Picture: TREVOR VEALE



The protest site of the solar farm off Ferrett's Rd.

Picture: TREVOR VEALE

He believes nearby property values will be reduced by as much as 40 per cent.

"Solar power is brilliant but not in an historic village like this. All the people who have come to live here like the country, but this will make it look like an industrial zone. It shouldn't be approved for a residential area."

Rebecca Whiley has lived in the area for 11 years and has three children. She is concerned that chemicals used to keep weeds down underneath the panels will impact local waterways.

"There's a swimming hole my children swim in every single

day and I'm worried about the health of the whole riparian zone."



Not all of the Orara Valley's residents are against the solar farm proposal.

Picture: TREVOR VEALE

Not all residents are opposed to the solar farm, including Peter Franklin who also came along to meet the *Advocate* holding a sign that read: 'Say yes to solar'.

"We got a very frosty welcome and they (people opposing the farm) got very irate so we stood back because we didn't want it to get too confrontational."

He said many of the fears were unfounded and doubted if many of those who had signed the petition had read the development application.

"They're giving people a lot of misinformation like there's going to be a lot of spraying but you can easily graze goats or sheep underneath the panels," Mr Franklin said. "We have blueberries expanding all over this area and they're spraying heaps of chemicals and over-extracting water.

"Blueberries are just exploded out of control - a lot of people are very upset about the way it's gone.

"If somebody said to me do you want blueberries or a solar farm next door, I would jump at a solar farm straight away."

Mr Franklin has lived in the area for 43 years and has been active in the community supporting Landcare, the local fire brigade and the hall committee. He sees the farm as an opportunity for the area to get on the front foot and embrace a future where coal will be phased out.

Rio Indygen has written to local residents outlining the proposal and promising they're "committed to involving and engaging the community in this decision-making stage of the project".

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The proposed site of the solar farm off Ferrett's Rd.

Picture: TREVOR VEALE

response will feature in a coming edition.



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