

GREEN HUB MAY HARM CAVES IN NULLARBOR



The landscape of the proposed Western Green Energy Hub area. Picture: Stefan and Bronwen Eberhard

ANNEKE DE BOER

The massive green energy hub proposed for the Goldfields would be "death by 1000 cuts" for the vast cave systems that make up the world's largest arid limestone karst,

according to a scientist working to stop the project.

The proposed Western Green Energy Hub would see 3000 wind turbines, 35 solar farms and a renewable hydrogen facility built north-west of Eucla along with a

stretch of offshore infrastructure.

Not-for-profit Save the Nullarbor co-founder Stefan Eberhard has voiced concerns the project would cause irreversible damage to the world's largest arid limestone karst.

Dr Eberhard said there were more

than 13,000 known karst features along the Nullarbor, with 4500 karsts recorded in the proposed hub area alone, including caves, sinkholes, blowholes and rock holes.

"If this project is allowed to go ahead it will cause unavoidable and

irreparable harm to an iconic Australian region with outstanding natural and cultural values of recognised world heritage significance," he said. "Quite simply,

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RACE WATER PLEA

Miners asked to help out club as a cloud looms over racing season

NEALE HARVEY

Goldfields businessman Ashok Parekh has weighed in on the best strategies to solve the region's ongoing water shortages that could skittle the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Club's 2025 season, amid a plea to the big mining

companies to "help out". KBRC officials earlier this year fought back from a scorching summer heatwave that killed off sections of the track and put this season in doubt.

The club is in a similar predicament in the lead-up to next year's program as the city of Kalgoorlie-

Boulder's recycled water supplies are taken up by an agreement with Lynas Rare Earths.

A report tabled at a council meeting last month said the city's recycled water supply capability only met the total agreed-upon Lynas quota — 1.7GL a year — with the company recently indicating it

would require the full amount by "early 2025".

It is a scenario that will leave the KBRC, which relies on recycled water from the city to maintain its turf track, high and dry.

Scorching temperatures are adding to the KBRC's concerns, with 40C forecast on Thursday and 38C

on Friday, and Mr Parekh said the issue was bigger than expected.

"My question would be 'are there any mining companies who have water allocations or know where to get water, and can they help the racing club out?'" he said. "I'd

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Teen overcomes arthritis setback

ANNEKE DE BOER

For most people, the thought of arthritis might conjure up an image of the elderly and frail — which is why it came as such a shock to Dawn Milligan when she was diagnosed

with the condition at the age of 13.

Despite the daily aching joints and throbbing pain in the years that followed, the young Kalgoorlie-Boulder resident graduated

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Asbestos hiccup at hospital site

ANNEKE DE BOER

An asbestos discovery has caused a hitch in construction for the long-awaited Laverton Hospital a month after site works started.

Fresh gravel will replace the contaminated soil

which will be removed and placed in a newly built disposal pit.

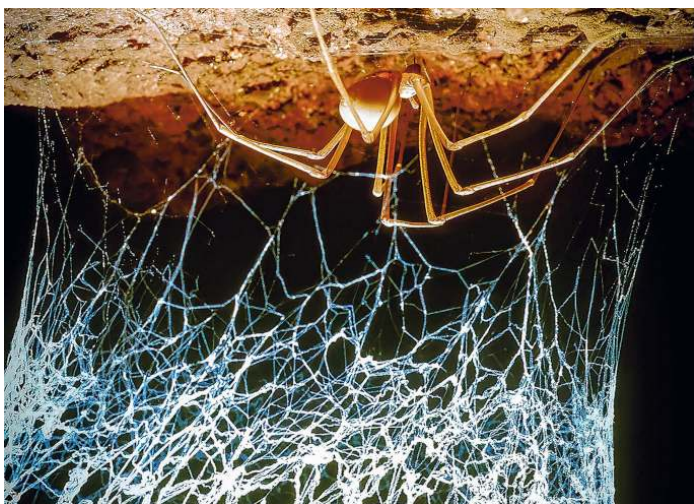
Laverton shire president Patrick Hill confirmed it was not expected to cause delays to the project.

"This happens quite often around the State

when you get old sites and you have to clean it all out," Mr Hill said.

Following negotiations between the Department of Finance and the shire, the council unanimously

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The karst features are home to some interesting wildlife.



There are more than 13,000 known karst features in the Nullarbor.

Hub 'death by 1000 cuts'

FROM PAGE 1

this project should not be constructed on any part of the Nullarbor limestone karst region or incised into the middle of the Great Australian Bight marine national parks."

The proposed hub is expected to bring 8000 people to the region, with a township being built to accommodate them.

Dr Eberhard said that number of people moving to the region meant damage to fragile cave systems would be "absolutely inevitable" as more visitors flooded caves in South Australia's Nullarbor National Park.

"I would liken it to death by 1000 cuts to the caves and other sensitive features on the Nullarbor if this project goes ahead," he said.

"Degradation and destruction in caves occur insidiously over many years and decades.

"Wherever someone places their footprint, it's there forever in some of these caves, and some of these caves are unique in the world — they've been there for 5 million years or longer, effectively unchanged."

Shire of Dundas president Laurene Bonza said the project would be an "absolute headache" from a town planning perspective, given the shire's current population was about 720.

"The logistics of putting 8000 people out there, it's bigger than my head can get around," she said.

"There are certainly some concerns as far as town planning, and there's some environmental concerns.

"I think the people out here are quite anxious about it . . . those people that live out at Eucla, there's about 50 of them, that's a significant impact on their life."

Under the proposal, the green energy hub would be built in seven stages and would have a capacity of up to 70GW.

The first stage is expected to generate about 6GW of hybrid wind and solar power and produce up to 330,000 tonnes a year of zero-emissions green hydrogen.

In September, WGEH chief executive Ray Macdonald said stage one could be significant in positioning Australia as a major participant globally in the emerging green hydrogen sector.

Although the hub would stretch



A Nullarbor cave. Picture: Stefan Eberhard and Bronwen Eberhard



The proposed Western Green Energy Hub area.

22,690sqkm from east of Cocklebidy to the South Australian border, 95 per cent of the land would remain undisturbed by operations under the proposal.

Dr Eberhard said while

avoiding cave systems may be possible to some degree, there would be a widespread impact from the grid-like infrastructure construction.

"The landscape will be gridded

by roads, powerlines and trenched pipelines, so it will effectively carve up and fragment the landscape," he said.

"Although the proponent has claimed that only 5 per cent of the

land area will be physically cleared for structures . . . there'll be enormous and unavoidable hydrological, ecological and biosecurity consequences.

"The development proposes to permanently or partially clear hundreds of square kilometres of vegetation . . . which will involve ripping up the fragile and erosion-prone soil and calcrete land surface."

Dr Eberhard likened the Nullarbor Plain to an intricate honeycomb, with changes to the surface affecting the complex cave system and aquifer lying beneath.

The green hub project will be open to a 10-week public comment period, announced by the Environmental Protection Authority last month after an initial seven-day consultation last month received 282 submissions.

EPA chair Darren Walsh said the scale of this proposal warranted a "lengthier-than-usual" public review period as part of the authority's impact assessment.