

DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	24-OPT-02
Project Title:	Compass Energy Storage Project
TN #:	263819
Document Title:	Sarah Eileen Mehta Comments - Information for review
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Sarah Eileen Mehta
Submitter Role:	Public
Submission Date:	6/3/2025 3:54:10 PM
Docketed Date:	6/4/2025

Comment Received From: Sarah Eileen Mehta
Submitted On: 6/3/2025
Docket Number: 24-OPT-02

Information for review

see attached

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

The communities of San Juan Capistrano and Laguna Niguel have been actively involved in this matter and fighting for their voices to be heard dating back to 2023. We are now in 2025, and these communities are still as committed as ever to prevent this project from overruling their individual residential rights to be involved in their local and state government and to be heard in our democratic society. The United States is a democracy - it's a representative democracy, also known as a republic - which means the government's power ultimately derives from the people, and citizens have the right to participate in local activism and hold their leaders accountable. The public hearings held on May 29th and June 3rd are a direct representation of this form of government, and California should be proud. However, it would be a disgrace to the state of California, and to our nation as a whole, to acknowledge the deep activism and concern of these residents only to override their natural authority as citizens to determine what happens in their community.

We've heard a lot from the CEC as well as from the project developers. However, many of the statements presented by the developers are factually inaccurate, untrue, and dishonest. I wrote down a few points from Engie's presentation that I would like to highlight as materially false. For context: myself, Cathleen Pryor - the President of the Laguna Niguel HOA, as well as the HOA leadership and several private community members met independently at the Laguna Niguel HOA corporate offices on March 21st, 2024, where we asked Engie's representatives a series of questions about this project. One of the questions asked by our team was, "What is the source of energy that is being drawn and stored in this BESS facility?" During the May 29th public hearing, the project manager made a statement on record that this facility is for storing excess solar power on the grid. I can tell you from our March 21st, 2024 meeting, when we asked Engie what the power source is, Engie themselves stated very clearly, "Some percentage being stored is solar, versus wind, versus just regular energy from the grid." HOA President Cathleen Pryor pressed, asking, "What percentage is renewable energy?" Engie's response was, "*We are not sure.*"

Engie is making false claims that we asked them about a year ago. This is not a green project for solar energy - this is just a power grid project like any other. Another statement repeated several times on the slide deck presented on May 29th by Engie's team is that the project site is located "outside of sensitive biological habitats." This statement is a lie. It is a materially false statement that is shocking and reckless. I volunteer on the project site, where we currently house the Saddleback Church Peace Farm. We use sustainable farming practices to provide free food to the local community, teach environmental science and sustainable farming classes to local elementary school children's disability programs, assist the Orange County juvenile correctional facility by providing alternative community service options for incarcerated youth, and serve local Boy Scout troops, the YMCA, and countless other public and nonprofit organizations. Myself and over 40 staff members are on this site weekly, and we can tell you:

there are sensitive biological habitats on these grounds. They live in peace alongside the farm, and we see them every week. We house an abundance of wildlife in this area, including rare and migratory birds, owls, mountain lions, and other precious animals.

On March 21st, 2024, in our HOA meeting, we asked Engie about their approach to sensitive wildlife. We asked, "We know we have endangered species on our site as well as an abundance of common wildlife species. If during your environmental impact report you come and see for yourself and locate these animals - will this at all impact or cause you to reconsider or cancel this project?" The answer we received from Engie was, *"We believe under the state of California there is a rule that if we disturb a natural habitat, we can pay a fine for that disturbance, so we would just pay the fee. But no, it would not stop the project."*

This is a deeply disturbing response, especially in California, where we pride ourselves on environmental and biological preservation. More than that, historical city mapping of the City of San Juan Capistrano highlights this area as land likely containing historical artifacts from Native American tribes. San Juan Capistrano is a historical community. It is very properly named "The Jewel of Orange County" because it is one of the last places you can go to see how early life in California started and enjoy vast landscapes of natural beauty.

This city has never been - and was never intended to be - a city of mass technological infrastructure. This city is a humble and holy city that seeks to preserve its history and environmental integrity. This developer already asked the city's permission for this project, and the city said no. Instead of respecting our local government and the wishes of our community, this developer steamrolled over the community and the wishes of its people and went to the state. This is deeply disrespectful to the system of our local government. This is wrong. What is the point of having rights as citizens, community members, and city governments if those rights are just a fleeting shadow to the power of big energy? This is not how our nation or our state was founded.

One of the other statements made by Engie during the May 29th public hearing was that they currently have a petition with 400 local signatories in favor of this project. This statement is a blatant lie. We downloaded the signatory list submitted by Engie to the CEC under the docket folder for this project, with the file name *"Support Petition – Attachment B."* In this support petition, the zip codes of all signatories were included - and we looked up these zip codes. Out of the 400 signatories, only 11 were local. Furthermore, the 380+ signatories who were not local were up to 630 miles outside of the project site. I will read just a few of the locations from these so-called "local" signatories: Seiad Valley—just 15 miles south of the Oregon border. Mount Shasta, Yreka, Montague, Junction City, Prattville, Redding, Greenville, Palmdale, Corona. The list goes on for three and a half pages of signatories who are 50 to 600+ miles away from this

project. These are not local signatories. This is a completely falsified statement and a false image presented to make it look like this project has support - when it does not.

Lastly and finally, Engie made statements during the May 29th public hearing that the Tesla Megapack 2XL does not emit toxic gases that will spread, will not have fire that spans beyond one unit, and will pose no threat to the public because this technology is sound and improved. I would like to remind the CEC of its own commitment to the community - that during this evaluation, it will not only review the history of fires and system failure events associated with this particular battery type but also with all BESS systems historically. According to the Electric Power Research Institute (also known as EPRI), there have been 96 BESS system failure and fire events since the inception of the technology in 2011. 96 events globally. The statement made today by Engie that the lithium-iron battery known as the Tesla Megapack 2XL is new, efficient, improved, and poses little to no safety risk - is materially false and untrue.

In 2023, a massive fire system failure event broke out at a BESS facility in Central Queensland, Australia. I have the report from that event, and I'll just read the opening lines: "Witnesses reported loud bangs, multi-colored flames, and a smell of burning plastic as a Tesla battery burned at one of Queensland's first large-scale battery storage sites after catching fire last night. Officers said the fire caused hazardous smoke to spread across the immediate area, and nearby residents were urged to keep respiratory medication close by. The battery that started the fire is a lithium Tesla Megapack 2.0 unit and is only one of 40 used at the site." The model that Engie will be using at this site is the Tesla 2XL. In researching the two models under Tesla's public information, it was stated that the engineering and material components of the Tesla 2.0 and Tesla 2XL are exactly the same with the only difference being dimension: *"The Tesla Megapack 2XL is a larger and more powerful version of the standard Megapack 2.0, being larger and heavier in dimension."* Therefore, the risks posed at the 2023 Queensland event are relevant to the risks that will be posed on this site in SJC.

I could go on and present countless facts that refute Engie's statements made during the May 29th meeting, because they're just plain false. Just because corporations lie on record multiple times, does not make their statements true.

In closing, I would urge the CEC: please, don't override our system of local government and the people in this community. You will set a grave precedent for future events to come.

Thank you.