

**DRAFT**

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

**ENERGY DIVISION**

**ID #10716  
RESOLUTION E-4436  
October 20, 2011**

**REDACTED**

**R E S O L U T I O N**

Resolution E-4436. Pacific Gas and Electric Company requests approval of a purchase power agreement with North Star Solar, LLC.

PROPOSED OUTCOME: This Resolution denies cost recovery for the long-term renewable energy power purchase agreement between Pacific Gas and Electric Company and North Star Solar, LLC.

ESTIMATED COST: Actual costs are confidential at this time.

By Advice Letter 3759-E filed on November 12, 2010 and supplemental Advice Letter 3759-E-A filed on July 27, 2011.

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**SUMMARY**

**Pacific Gas and Electric Company's renewable energy power purchase agreement with North Star Solar, LLC is rejected without prejudice.**

Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) filed Advice Letter (AL) 3759-E on November 12, 2010 and supplemental AL 3759-E-A on July 27, 2011, requesting approval of a 20 year Purchase Power Agreement (PPA) with North Star Solar, LLC (North Star) which resulted from the 2009 RPS Solicitation.

North Star proposes that the 60 megawatt (MW) photovoltaic facility be developed in the Westlands Water District near Mendota, California. PG&E states that the Project will be located in a known solar resource area and will deliver approximately 136 gigawatt-hours (GWh) per year of as-available RPS-eligible energy with a commercial operation date (COD) of June 30, 2013. The first point of interconnection for the Project will be into the California Independent System Operator balancing authority area which PG&E states is likely to be the Mendota substation.

The Commission rejects, without prejudice, the proposed North Star Solar agreement because the contract is not price competitive with 1) recently

executed contracts, and 2) contracts that are currently being offered to PG&E. Specifically, the North Star Solar contract is not competitive with bilateral contracts recently executed by PG&E nor is it competitive with PG&E's preliminary shortlisted bids from its 2011 RPS solicitation. The North Star project was fairly compared against projects utilizing the same technology, with similar online dates, located within the state of California and with similar or higher viability scores. Furthermore, recognizing that the North Star agreement is fully negotiated with firm pricing, the contract was compared fairly against recently executed bilateral contracts for which negotiations have resulted in signed and firm agreements with PG&E.

The advice letter is rejected *without prejudice* because if North Star Solar, LLC executes a new agreement with competitive pricing and meets the needs of PG&E's 33% RPS goals, it will be evaluated on its own merits.

The following table summarizes the Project-specific features of the agreement:

Generating Facility	Type	Term Years	MW Capacity	Annual Deliveries	Online Date	Project Location
North Star Solar	Solar PV	20	60	136 GWh	June 30, 2013	Fresno County, CA

**BACKGROUND**

**Overview of the Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS) Program**

The California RPS Program was established by Senate Bill (SB) 1078, and has been subsequently modified by SB 107, SB 1036 and SB 2 (1x).<sup>1</sup> The RPS program is codified in Public Utilities Code Sections 399.11-399.20.<sup>2</sup> Under SB 2 (1x),<sup>3</sup> the RPS program administered by the Commission requires each retail seller to increase its total procurement of eligible renewable energy resources so

<sup>1</sup> SB 1078 (Sher, Chapter 516, Statutes of 2002); SB 107 (Simitian, Chapter 464, Statutes of 2006); SB 1036 (Perata, Chapter 685, Statutes of 2007); SB 2 (1x) (Simitian, Chapter 1, Statutes of 2011, First Extraordinary Session).

<sup>2</sup> All further references to sections refer to Public Utilities Code unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> SB 2 (1x) becomes effective on December 10, 2011; 90 days after the close of the Legislatures 2011 Extraordinary Session.

that 33 percent of retail sales are served by eligible renewable energy resources no later than December 31, 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Additional background information about the Commission's RPS Program, including links to relevant laws and Commission decisions, is available at <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/energy/Renewables/overview.htm> and <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/energy/Renewables/decisions.htm>.

## **NOTICE**

Notice of AL 3759-E-A was made by publication in the Commission's Daily Calendar. Pacific Gas and Electric Company states that a copy of the Advice Letter was mailed and distributed in accordance with Section 3.14 of General Order 96-B.

## **PROTESTS**

Advice Letter AL 3759-E-A was not protested.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **PG&E requests Commission approval of a new renewable energy contract with North Star Solar, LLC.**

On November 12, 2010, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) filed Advice Letter (AL) 3759-E. In AL 3759-E, PG&E requested Commission approval of a renewable energy contract with North Star Solar, LLC (North Star or Project) for generation from its proposed North Star Solar photovoltaic facility. The Project is the result of PG&E's 2009 RPS solicitation.

On June 9, 2011, the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) issued draft resolution E-4405 which recommended rejecting, without prejudice, the original North Star agreement "because the Project is not price competitive with projects that are currently being offered to PG&E." As a result of the resolution, a number of comment letters were submitted to the Commission both in support and against Energy Division's proposal to reject the North Star agreement in E-4405. The comments are discussed in more detail in the Comments section of this draft resolution.

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<sup>4</sup> See SB 2 (1x), § 399.15(b)(2)(B)

Both the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (DRA) and the Utility Reform Network (TURN) supported the proposed resolution stating that the price of the North Star contract was high compared to similar projects and unreasonable. Additionally, TURN commented that the Commission in the past has made multiple concessions and has allowed the upward modification of contract prices. TURN believes the principle of symmetry should apply as the costs for renewable energy facilities decline as they have over the past two years.

PG&E voiced opposition to the recommendation of the draft resolution and argued that the Commission was unfairly comparing the North Star contract to projects that were bilaterally negotiated but for which negotiations eventually ended. Furthermore, PG&E, North Star's legal counsel and the Independent Energy Producers (IEP) argued that the North Star project was being unfairly compared to shortlisted projects resulting from PG&E's 2011 Solar PV Program Solicitation.

North Star' legal counsel also alleges that the Resolution contained legal errors in that it errs by improperly applying the standard of review for agreements and amendments, rather than for original agreements as set forth in Resolution E-4199.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 100, the Building & Construction Trades Council, and the City of Mendota all argued that a rejection of the original North Star agreement will deny crucial economic and job benefits.

Lastly, the Large-Scale Solar Association (LSA) commented that the draft resolution injects uncertainty into the renewable energy development sector and that cost containment policies should be addressed in the RPS proceeding rather than through the advice letter process.

On June 9, 2011, PG&E and North Star amended the Purchase Power Agreement (amended PPA) and filed AL 3759-E-A on July 27, 2011. The amended PPA 1) decreases the PPA price over 20%, 2) increases the expected average annual generation from 119 gigawatt hours (GWhs) to 136 GWhs, 3) extends the transmission delay date, 4) extends the date by which Commission approval is needed, and 5) makes changes to terms concerning financing termination rights and development security.

Under the terms of the amended PPA, the Project has a commercial operation date (COD) of June 30, 2013 and is expected to deliver bundled energy (i.e. energy plus the underlying green attribute) to PG&E for a term of 20 years.

The Project is proposed to be located in Fresno County, CA on leased land from the Westlands Water District. Renewable Energy Corporation ASA, one of the two partners in North Star Solar, LLC, will provide all of the approximately 300,000 solar PV modules for the Project. North Star's first point of interconnection is proposed to be with the California Independent System Operator balancing authority area (CAISO BAA).

**PG&E requests that the Commission issue a resolution containing the following findings:**

1. Approves the PPA in its entirety, including payments to be made by PG&E pursuant to the PPA, subject to the Commission's review of PG&E's administration of the PPA.
2. Finds that any procurement pursuant to the PPA is procurement from an eligible renewable energy resource for purposes of determining PG&E's compliance with any obligation that it may have to procure eligible renewable energy resources pursuant to the California Renewables Portfolio Standard (Public Utilities Code Section 399.11 et seq.) ("RPS") D.03-06-071 and D.06-10-050, or other applicable law.
3. Finds that all procurement and administrative costs, as provided by Public Utilities Code section 399.14(g), associated with the PPA shall be recovered in rates.
4. Adopts the following finding of fact and conclusion of law in support of CPUC Approval:
  - a. The PPA is consistent with PG&E's 2009 RPS procurement plan.
  - b. The terms of the PPA, including the price of delivered energy, are reasonable.
5. Adopts the following finding of fact and conclusion of law in support of cost recovery for the PPA:
  - a. The utility's costs under the PPA shall be recovered through PG&E's Energy Resource Recovery Account.
  - b. Any stranded costs that may arise from the PPA are subject to the provisions of D.04-12-048 that authorize recovery of stranded renewables procurement costs over the life of the contract. The implementation of the D.04-12-048 stranded cost recovery mechanism is addressed in D.08-09-012.
6. Adopts the following findings with respect to resource compliance with the Emissions Performance Standard ("EPS") adopted in R.06-04-009:

a. The PPA is not covered procurement subject to the EPS because the generating facility has a forecast capacity factor of less than 60 percent and, therefore, is not baseload generation under paragraphs 1(a)(ii) and 3(2)(a) of the Adopted Interim EPS Rules.

**Energy Division Evaluated the Amended PPA on the Following Grounds:**

- Consistency with PG&E's least-cost-best-fit (LCBF) methodology
- Consistency with RPS standard terms and conditions
- Reasonableness of the proposed contract price and the project's value
- Independent Evaluator review
- Cost Containment
- Project viability assessment and development status
- Compliance with the Interim Greenhouse Gas Emissions Performance Standard
- Procurement Review Group participation

**Consistency with PG&E's least-cost best-fit (LCBF) methodology**

In D.04-07-029, the Commission directs the utilities to use certain criteria in their LCBF selection of renewable resources.<sup>5</sup> The decision offers guidance regarding the process by which the utility ranks bids in order to select or "shortlist" the bids with which it will commence negotiations. As described in its 2009 and 2011 RPS Procurement Plan, PG&E's approved process for identifying LCBF renewable resources focuses on four primary areas:

1. Determination of market value of bid,
2. Calculation of transmission adders and integration costs,
3. Evaluation of portfolio fit, and
4. Consideration of non-price factors.

The Commission finds that the North Star contract is higher in price, lower in value, and lower in viability than comparable projects that were being offered to PG&E during the time that the amended PPA was being negotiated and executed. Therefore, the North Star PPA was not evaluated consistent with the LCBF methodology identified in PG&E's 2009 and 2011 RPS Procurement Plan. See Confidential Appendix A for a comparison of North Star's price, viability and value to other comparable projects.

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<sup>5</sup> See §399.14(a)(2)(B)

### **Consistency with RPS Standard Terms and Conditions**

The Commission adopted a set of standard terms and conditions (STCs) required in RPS contracts, four of which are considered “non-modifiable.” The STCs were compiled in D.08-04-009 and subsequently amended in D.08-08-028. More recently in D.10-03-021, as modified by D.11-01-025, the Commission further refined these STCs.

The Amended PPA includes the Commission-adopted RPS “non-modifiable” standard terms and conditions, as set forth in D.08-04-009, D.08-08-028, and D.10-03-021, as modified by D.11-01-025.

### **Reasonableness of the Proposed Contract Price and the Project’s Value**

The Commission’s reasonableness review for PPAs eligible for RPS compliance includes a comparison of the proposed contract to all currently available market data. The objective of the Commission is to determine whether a proposed contract’s price and value are reasonable compared to other contracts that are being offered in the marketplace. Therefore, the Commission will evaluate all relevant market data which may include, a) shortlisted projects from the applicable solicitation, b) bilateral offers at the time the contracts were executed, c) contracts recently approved, d) contracts pending Commission approval, e) recently executed contracts, f) recent bilateral offers, and g) recent solicitation data.

The Commission evaluated the amended PPA, as filed in supplemental AL 3759-E-A on July 27, 2011, and compared it against 1) recently executed bilateral contracts, and 2) shortlisted bids from PG&E’s 2011 RPS solicitation. PG&E provided a list of recently executed bilateral contracts in the confidential section of AL 3759-E-A. Furthermore, PG&E’s 2011 RPS Solicitation closed for bid submissions on July 11, 2011, or sixteen days before the mailing of AL 3759-E-A. Therefore, these two sets of market data provide the most relevant information at the time that the amended PPA was being negotiated and executed.

### **Recently Executed Bilateral Contracts**

The amended PPA was compared against recently executed bilateral contracts. These contracts are PPAs that PG&E negotiated and signed during the period that the amended PPA was being negotiated up until supplemental AL 3759-E-A was filed on July 27, 2011. A comparison of the amended PPA against recently executed bilateral contracts provides a fair assessment of the market conditions that existed when the amended PPA was being negotiated. Furthermore, Energy Division compared the amended PPA to only executed bilateral offers, as

opposed to all bilateral offers that were brought to PG&E during the time the amended PPA was being negotiated. Recognizing that the amended is fully negotiated with firm pricing, the contract was compared fairly against only recently executed bilateral contracts for which negotiations have resulted in signed and firm agreements with PG&E.

AL 3759-E-A amended a number of terms in the original PPA including the contract price. PG&E and North Star Solar, LLC agreed to decrease the contract price by over 20% from the initial agreement which was filed in AL 3759-E on November 12, 2010. Despite the decrease in contract price, the amended PPA still compares unfavorably to the bilateral contracts that were executed by PG&E during the time that the amended PPA was being negotiated and executed.

The Commission also compared the net market value (NMV) of the amended PPA against the NMV of recently executed bilateral contracts. The amended PPA compared unfavorably to PG&E's recently executed bilateral contracts. A comparison of the NMV is a mandatory standard of review that the Commission performs for all contracts and it is fundamental metric utilized in PG&E's selection process when it evaluates projects using its Least-Cost-Best-Fit methodology. See Confidential Appendix A for a discussion on the amended PPA's net market value.

#### Shortlisted Projects From PG&E's 2011 RPS Solicitation

The North Star Solar agreement was also compared against PG&E's preliminary shortlisted projects from its 2011 RPS Solicitation. PG&E's 2011 RPS Solicitation was closed for project submissions on July 11, 2011. The Commission was notified of PG&E's preliminary shortlist on August 12, 2011. The amended PPA was fairly compared against projects shortlisted that; a) utilize the same technology, b) have similar online dates, c) are located within the state of California, and d) have similar or higher viability scores. By filtering PG&E's shortlisted projects using these four criteria, the amended PPA was fairly compared only against similar projects to eliminate any technology, timing, location, or quality/viability bias that may exist. Despite eliminating all shortlisted projects that may benefit comparably against the proposed agreement, the amended PPA still compared unfavorably against shortlisted projects that met all of the Commission's criteria.

The Commission finds that the amended North Star contract price is high and net market value is low compared to other comparable renewable RPS-eligible projects that have been recently executed by PG&E and offered to PG&E in the 2011 RPS Solicitation. PG&E provides no additional rationale or justification for the contract price or net market value. See Confidential Appendix A for a



comparison of North Star's price, viability and value to other comparable projects.

### **Independent Evaluator Review**

Arroyo Seco Consulting provided a Statement of Independent Evaluator for supplemental AL 3759-E-A. The Independent Evaluator participated in the negotiation's material discussions and communications, evaluated the PPA, and concluded that the PPA merits approval with a reservation. Arroyo's concern is that, while the amended PPA ranks as moderate in net value, it is not fully competitive with alternative sources of RPS-eligible power in the current California market, including alternatives that offer the potential for PG&E to meet its compliance needs at lower prices and with higher project viability than the amended PPA.

Consistent with D.06-05-039 and D.09-06-050, an independent evaluator oversaw PG&E's negotiations with North Star Solar, LLC and recommends the contract be approved with a reservation. See Confidential Appendices C and D for the Independent Evaluator's summary comments on AL 3759-E-A.

### **Cost Containment**

Pursuant to statute, the Commission calculates a market price referent (MPR) to assess whether a proposed RPS contract has above-market costs.<sup>6</sup> Contracts that meet certain are eligible for above-MPR funds (AMF). Based on the North Star project's 2013 commercial operation date, PG&E estimates that the price of the contract exceeds the applicable 2009 MPR.<sup>7</sup>

Public Utilities Code §399.15 (d)(4) states that an investor-owned utility can voluntarily procure contracts at above-MPR prices that are not counted toward the cost limitation.

Because there are above-market costs associated with this contract, and PG&E has exhausted its above-MPR funds, PG&E voluntarily entered into the North Star contract as permitted under the Pub. Util. Code.

### **Project Viability and Development Status**

All projects reviewed by the CPUC are assigned a viability score by the utility which is included in the advice letter filing and updated in a confidential semi-annual filing to the CPUC. The viability score takes into consideration important

<sup>6</sup> See Pub. Util. Code § 399.15(c).

<sup>7</sup> See Resolution E-4298.

metrics of a project including 1) developer experience, 2) site location, 3) permitting status, 4) resource quality, and 5) interconnection progress. See Confidential Appendix A for a comparison of the North Star project's viability to other comparable projects.

The North Star project viability score ranks lower than comparable projects based on the most recent viability scores submitted to the Commission. See Confidential Appendix A for a comparison of the Project's price, viability and value to other comparable projects.

### **Compliance with the Interim Greenhouse Gas Emissions Performance Standard**

California Pub. Utils. Code §§ 8340 and 8341 require that the Commission consider emissions costs associated with new long-term (five years or greater) baseload power contracts procured on behalf of California ratepayers.<sup>8</sup>

D.07-01-039 adopted an interim Emissions Performance Standard (EPS) that establishes an emission rate for obligated facilities at levels no greater than the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of a combined-cycle gas turbine power plant. Generating facilities using certain renewable resources are deemed compliant with the EPS.<sup>9</sup>

If the amended PPA were to be approved, it would meet the conditions for EPS compliance established in D.07-01-039 because the Project's facility is one of the pre-approved renewable energy technologies listed in D.07-01-039 that are deemed EPS compliant.

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<sup>8</sup> "Baseload generation" is electricity generation at a power plant "designed and intended to provide electricity at an annualized plant capacity factor of at least 60%." Pub. Utils. Code § 8340 (a).

<sup>9</sup> D.07-01-039, Attachment 7, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> PG&E's PRG includes representatives of the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Coalition of California Utility Employees, The Utility Reform Network, the California Public Utility Commission's Energy Division and Division of Ratepayer Advocates, the California Department of Water Resources and Jan Reid, as a PG&E ratepayer.

## **Procurement Review Group Participation**

The Procurement Review Group (PRG) was initially established in D.02-08-071 as an advisory group to review and assess the details of the IOUs' overall procurement strategy, solicitations, specific proposed procurement contracts and other procurement processes prior to submitting filings to the Commission.<sup>10</sup> PG&E asserts that the original PPA was discussed at PRG meetings in October 21, 2009, April 9, 2010, June 24, 2010, August 13, 2010 and October 8, 2010.

Pursuant to D.02-08-071, PG&E's Procurement Review Group participated in the review of the original PPA. The Procurement Review Group did not participate in the review of the amended PPA.

## **RPS Eligibility and CPUC Approval**

Pursuant to Pub. Util. Code § 399.13, the CEC certifies eligible renewable energy resources. Generation from a resource that is not CEC-certified cannot be used to meet RPS requirements. To ensure that only CEC-certified energy is procured under a Commission-approved RPS contract, the Commission has required standard and non-modifiable "eligibility" language in all RPS contracts. That language requires a seller to warrant that the project qualifies and is certified by the CEC as an "Eligible Renewable Energy Resource," that the project's output delivered to the buyer qualifies under the requirements of the California RPS, and that the seller uses commercially reasonable efforts to maintain eligibility should there be a change in law affecting eligibility.<sup>11</sup>

The Commission requires a standard and non-modifiable clause in all RPS contracts that requires "CPUC Approval" of a PPA to include an explicit finding that "any procurement pursuant to this Agreement is procurement from an eligible renewable energy resource for purposes of determining Buyer's compliance with any obligation that it may have to procure eligible renewable energy resources pursuant to the California Renewables Portfolio Standard (*Public Utilities Code Section 399.11 et seq.*), Decision 03-06-071, or other applicable law."<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding this language, the Commission has no jurisdiction to determine whether a project is an eligible renewable energy resource, neither can the

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<sup>10</sup> PG&E's PRG includes representatives of the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Coalition of California Utility Employees, The Utility Reform Network, the California Public Utility Commission's Energy Division and Division of Ratepayer Advocates, the California Department of Water Resources and Jan Reid, as a PG&E ratepayer.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. D. 08-04-009 at Appendix A, STC 6, Eligibility.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. D. 08-04-009 at Appendix A, STC 1, CPUC Approval.

Commission determine prior to final CEC certification of a project, that “any procurement” pursuant to a specific contract will be “procurement from an eligible renewable energy resource.”

Therefore, while we include the required finding here, this finding has never been intended, and shall not be read now, to allow the generation from a non-RPS-eligible resource to count towards an RPS compliance obligation. Nor shall such finding absolve the seller of its obligation to obtain CEC certification, or the utility of its obligation to pursue remedies for breach of contract. Such contract enforcement activities shall be reviewed pursuant to the Commission’s authority to review the utilities’ administration of contracts.

### **Confidential Information**

The Commission, in implementing Pub. Util. Code § 454.5(g), has determined in D.06-06-066, as modified by D.07-05-032, that certain material submitted to the Commission as confidential should be kept confidential to ensure that market sensitive data does not influence the behavior of bidders in future RPS solicitations. D.06-06-066 adopted a time limit on the confidentiality of specific terms in RPS contracts. Such information, such as price, is confidential for three years from the date the contract states that energy deliveries begin, except contracts between IOUs and their affiliates, which are public.

The confidential appendices, marked "[REDACTED]" in the public copy of this resolution, as well as the confidential portions of the advice letter, should remain confidential at this time.

### **COMMENTS**

Public Utilities Code section 311(g)(1) provides that this resolution must be served on all parties and subject to at least 30 days public review and comment prior to a vote of the Commission. Section 311(g)(2) provides that this 30-day period may be reduced or waived upon the stipulation of all parties in the proceeding.

The 30-day comment period for the draft of this resolution was neither waived or reduced. Accordingly, this draft resolution was mailed to parties for comments, and will be placed on the Commission's agenda no earlier than 30 days from today.

The Commission provided a 30 day comment period after the publication of draft resolution E-4405 on June 9, 2011 which proposed rejecting the original North Star agreement that was filed in AL 3759-E on November 12, 2010. The Commission received nine letters within the allowed 30 day comment period. All

of these letters pre-date supplemental AL 3759-E-A which decreased the price of the contract by over 20%.

Two parties that filed comments in favor of rejecting the North Star agreement were the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (DRA) and The Utility Reform Network (TURN). Both organizations agree that the price of the project as proposed in the original PPA is unreasonably high compared to other available projects being offered in the market.

Additionally, TURN commented that the Commission in the past has made multiple concessions and has allowed the upward modification of contract prices. TURN believes the principle of symmetry should apply as the costs for renewable energy facilities decline as they have over the past two years. The Commission compares the price and value of a contract to comparable projects that were negotiated and executed around the same timeframe. If the price and value of comparable contracts change over this period, the contract that is being considered by the Commission should reflect this change in the market. Therefore, the Commission adheres to the principle of symmetry that TURN supports and has always adhered to this principle in its standard of review.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 100, the Building & Construction Trades Council, and the City of Mendota all commented that a rejection of the original North Star agreement will deny crucial economic and job benefits. These concerns are outside of the scope of evaluating RPS eligible projects utilizing a least-cost-best fit standard of review.

Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosaiti (WSGR), legal counsel for North Star Solar, LLC argue that the draft resolution E-4405, published on June 9, 2011 should have compared the original PPA only to other agreements resulting from the 2009 solicitation or contemporaneous bilateral agreements. The Commission adequately and fairly compared the original PPA to both results from the 2009 solicitation and contemporaneous bilateral agreements that were executed by PG&E in the time period that the original PPA was negotiated. The Commission performed this comparison in its initial evaluation of the original PPA<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, a fair comparison was recently performed after supplemental AL 3759-E-A was filed on July 27, 2011 with the executed bilateral contract data supplied by PG&E. See Confidential Appendix A for a comparison on the amended PPA with recently executed bilateral contracts signed by PG&E.

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<sup>13</sup> See p. 5 of E-4405

WSGR also state “the flaw in the draft resolution’s logic is perhaps most evident in the fact that the Commission would never increase the PPA price had market prices increased.” On the contrary, TURN states in its comment letter that “the IOUs have been willing to accommodate reasonable and justifiable increases on a case-by-case basis” and that “the Commission has approved many such modifications over the years.” Both TURN and Energy Division have been directly involved in the RPS procurement decision-making process and have been involved in several resolutions that have resulted from modifications due to requests for price increases by the utility.

WSGR also argue that it is irrational to compare the original PPA as filed in AL 3759-E on November 12, 2010 to bids in PG&E’s Solar PV Program and suggests the Commission is “comparing apples to oranges.” WSGR argues that bids in the Solar PV Program should not be compared to a firm contract. PG&E also argues in its protest letter that the original PPA should not be compared to projects available after the execution of the PPA or the submission of the advice letter. The Commission’s position relies on the following considerations.

First, the price cap for PG&E’s Solar PV program was significantly higher than the original price for the proposed North Star contract. Therefore, the allowable price range for the Solar PV Program was higher than the original price of the North Star PPA and did not restrict bidders from exceeding a price cap that was lower than the price of the original North Star PPA. That said, Solar PV bidders were not range bound and the cap did not unfairly bias prices of projects in the program downward.

Second, the capacity cap of 20 MW for the Solar PV Program does restrict the participation of larger projects such as North Star. However, larger projects have consistently shown to benefit from greater economies of scale resulting in lower prices. Therefore, consistent with historic market information, North Star is not disadvantaged by the capacity cap.

Third, the North Star project is located in California so it is not disadvantaged by the Solar PV program’s requirement for California-based generation.

Fourth, there is a four month gap between when AL 3759-E was filed on November 12, 2010 and when the deadline for bidders to submit offers closed for the Solar PV Program. While a direct overlap in time did not occur, the close proximity in time allowed the Commission the ability to assess the market conditions that existed around the time that AL 3759-E was filed. Negotiations between North Star Solar, LLC and PG&E began in December 2009 and continued for nearly a year until AL 3759-E was filed. The market changed

meaningfully over this period. The results from PG&E's Solar PV Program reflect this change and the original North Star agreement did not reflect this change.

Lastly, it is true that the original PPA was an executed contract and that the Solar PV Program consists of bids. However, projects in the Solar PV Program are required to<sup>14</sup>:

- Be primarily ground-mounted systems in the one to 20 MW range;
- Be located within PG&E's service territory;
- Demonstrate site control;
- Have a complete interconnection application filed with PG&E within two weeks following a shortlist notification;
- Have a pre time-of-delivery adjusted contract price no greater than \$246/MWh;
- May not participate in the California Solar Initiative or net energy metering programs; and
- Must be scheduled to begin initial operation within 18 months following Commission approval of the PPA.

Furthermore, PG&E's standard PPAs require that sellers make reasonable efforts for any facility developed under the Solar PV Program to qualify as a Resource Adequacy (RA) resource.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, successful bidders in the Solar PV Program are bound by strict requirements in PG&E's standard offer PPAs. Hence, while the successful bids were not executed contracts, they were bound by the same requirements of an executed contract due to the strict requirements of the program making them comparable.

WSGR also argue that rejection of the resolution will harm California's renewable energy market and dissuade experienced developers from investing in projects in the California market. WSGR's argument is without merit. The recent 2011 RPS Solicitation was the largest in California's history and included highly viable competitive bids from experienced developers. The 2011 RPS Solicitation reflects a very healthy market with numerous market participants willing to invest in the California renewable energy market.

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<sup>14</sup> See E-4368 at 5

<sup>15</sup> See, Small PPA at §3.3 and §3.4; Large PPA at §3.3 and Appendix X

WSGR alleges that the resolution contains legal errors in that it "(1) errs by applying a new and improper standard for review for price reasonableness; (2) it errs by improperly applying the standard of review for agreements and amendments, rather than for original agreements as set forth in Resolution E-4199." These allegations are without merit as they rely on a narrow interpretation of Resolution E-4199 that could lead to absurd results and ignores language in Resolution E-4199 stating that, "...Energy Division staff always has the option on a case-by-case basis to request data to substantiate the contract price..."(p. 26.). WSGR's concerns are also contrary to the principle stated in PU Code Section 1708 that the Commission is not strictly bound by its own precedent, especially here where the matters at issue are not substantive rights of parties but how the Commission adheres to its own "criteria and guidelines" to determine if a contract is too expensive for ratepayers to bear.

WSGR's argument would restrict the Commission to comparing the North Star contract to only PG&E's 2009 RPS solicitation and ignore all the years of market data during the time that the North Star agreement was being negotiated and executed. Comparing the North Star contract to only 2009 vintage contract prices in late 2010 is clearly not in the best interest of ratepayers. Despite WSGR's argument, the Commission did compare the North Star contract against shortlisted projects from the 2009 RPS Solicitation as well as market data that existed during the time the North Star contract was being negotiated and executed. This analysis is a typical standard of review and is necessary to provide a true comparison of the contract to the Commission.

IEP argues that comparison of the North Star agreement's original PPA with PG&E's Solar PV solicitation creates an "apples to oranges" comparison. The Commission disagrees and the rationale for comparing the North Star agreement to the Solar PV Program is outlined explicitly in the preceding paragraphs.

IEP also comments that the Commission should not fall into the trap of rejecting a fully negotiated contract today based on the expectation that costs in the future will be lower. In addition, IEP comments that timing the market will lead to inaction and ultimately a failure to meet the RPS goals. The Commission agrees with both comments. Energy Division does not compare projects based on the expectation that costs in the future will be lower. Rather, the Commission compares projects partially based on the market conditions that prevailed at the time a contract was negotiated and executed. This was explained in detail in the preceding paragraphs.

Finally, IEP comments that a procurement process that requires two years to get to ultimate Commission approval will have a very difficult time ever getting to the



right price. The Commission believes negotiations should continuously reflect prevailing market conditions over time and result in a contract price that is reasonable. Lengthly contract negotiations that do not result in a reasonable contract face the risk of being rejected by the Commission.

The Large-scale Solar Association (LSA) commented that the draft resolution injects uncertainty into the renewable energy development sector. On the contrary, the proposal to reject a contract based on uncompetitive price, value and viability provides certainty in a market for participants by leveling the playing field and rewarding projects that are highly competitive.

LSA also commented that cost containment policies should be addressed in the RPS proceeding rather than through the advice letter process. The Commission is not prescribing a new “cost containment” mechanism when it evaluates contracts for Commission review. The Commission has consistently evaluated contracts based on several metrics including price, value, risk, and need. That said, the Commission has evaluated the amended PPA by using the same metrics it has used for prior contracts submitted to the Commission for review.

PG&E argued that a number of the bilateral offers that the Commission initially compared to the original PPA in E-4405 on June 9, 2011 have been withdrawn or negotiations were terminated because the projects did not remain competitive. PG&E is correct in stating that the Commission compared the original PPA against all bilaterals that were being negotiated at that time. The Commission compared the original PPA against a list of bilaterals that PG&E furnished in a data request on April 25, 2011. Therefore, the Commission relied on the information that PG&E provided. Nonetheless, to provide a fair comparison, the Commission retroactively evaluated the original PPA against four projects out of all bilaterals provided by PG&E that have since resulted in contracts. These four contracts represented 40% of the total generation in the original list of bilaterals provided by PG&E. The original PPA was still uncompetitive in price and value against this new list of executed bilaterals that are also higher in viability.

When PG&E filed supplemental AL 3759-E-A on July 27, 2011 amending the North Star agreement to decrease the PPA price by over 20%, the Commission was furnished with a second list of bilaterals that resulted in executed PPAs during the time that the amended PPA was being negotiated. The North Star agreement is uncompetitive to this group based on price, value and viability as has been discussed.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

1. The North Star PPA was not evaluated consistent with the LCBF methodology identified in PG&E’s 2009 and 2011 RPS Procurement Plan.

2. The amended PPA includes the Commission-adopted RPS “non-modifiable” standard terms and conditions, as set forth in D.08-04-009, D.08-08-028, and D.10-03-021, as modified by D.11-01-025.
3. The Commission finds that the amended North Star contract price is high and net market value is low compared to other comparable renewable RPS-eligible projects that have been recently executed by PG&E and offered to PG&E in the 2011 RPS Solicitation. PG&E provides no additional rationale or justification for the contract price or net market value.
4. Consistent with D.06-05-039 and D.09-06-050, an independent evaluator oversaw PG&E’s negotiations with North Star Solar, LLC and recommends the amended PPA be approved with a reservation.
5. Based on the North Star project’s 2013 commercial operation date, PG&E estimates that the amended PPA price of the contract exceeds the applicable 2009 MPR.
6. PG&E voluntarily entered into the amended PPA, which PG&E estimates will exceed the applicable 2009 MPR on an all-in levelized cost basis.
7. The amended PPA’s project viability score ranks lower than comparable projects based on the most recent viability scores submitted to the Commission.
8. If the amended PPA were to be approved, it would meet the conditions for EPS compliance established in D.07-01-039 because the Project’s facility is one of the pre-approved renewable energy technologies listed in D.07-01-039 that are deemed EPS compliant.
9. Pursuant to D.02-08-071, PG&E’s Procurement Review Group participated in the review of the original PPA. The Procurement Review Group did not participate in the review of the amended PPA.
10. The confidential appendices, marked “[REDACTED]” in the public copy of this resolution, as well as the confidential portions of the advice letter, should remain confidential at this time.
11. It was reasonable to compare the amended PPA to market conditions that prevailed at the time the contract was negotiated and executed.
12. On June 9, 2011, timely comments were submitted in response to E-4405 by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 100, the Building & Construction Trades Council, and the City of Mendota. These comments were disposed of in E-4436.
13. On June 13, 2011, timely comments were submitted in response to E-4405 by the Division of Ratepayer Advocates, the Utility Reform Network, Pacific Gas and Electric, the Independent Energy Producers, the Large-scale Solar

Association, and Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati. These comments were disposed of in E-4436.

14. Advice letter 3759-E and Supplemental AL 3759-E-A should be rejected, without prejudice.

**THEREFORE IT IS ORDERED THAT:**

1. The power purchase agreement between Pacific Gas and Electric Company and North Star Solar, LLC proposed in Advice Letter 3759-E and Supplemental 3759-E-A is rejected without prejudice.
2. This Resolution is effective today.

I certify that the foregoing resolution was duly introduced, passed and adopted at a conference of the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California held on October 20, 2011; the following Commissioners voting favorably thereon:

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PAUL CLANON  
Executive Director

**Confidential Appendix A**

**Comparison of North Star Solar Pricing, Viability and Value**

[REDACTED]

Confidential Appendix B

North Star PPA Major Contract Provisions

[REDACTED]

## Confidential Appendix C

Independent Evaluator Discussion of Merit for  
Approval for AL 3759-E-A

[REDACTED]

## Confidential Appendix D

Independent Evaluator Amended Comments for AL  
3759-E-A

[REDACTED]

