

# Pay us the fair price

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# Pay us the fair price

BY LOUISE NICHOLS

FIRST they were angry that their properties were to be compulsory acquired to build the \$700 million Singleton bypass but now those landholders are frustrated and tired of having to fight for what they consider is just compensation for the loss of their farms.

Standing beside a lucerne crop on Bec Hatch's family farm she along with Chris

McNamara and Maurice Butler were united in calling on the NSW government to pay them the market value for their agricultural holdings plus compensation for the loss of income they have and will incur when the farms are acquired.

"Some people say just take the money and relocate. Well its not that simple first we have to agree a sale price for the farm and then we have to find another farm similar to

ours and that is no easy matter," said Mrs Hatch.

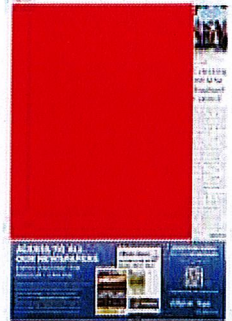
"I am looking at that lucerne paddock and people are chasing hay since the flood and we could sell everything we cut but we have received a threatening letter from Transport NSW saying the are coming onto the property to do investigations so how can we carrying on farming with that threat hanging over us." The Hatch and McNamara family's are

neighbours on the southern edge of town with farms that front the Hunter River. Mr Butler's property is located at Whittingham where the bypass will start and they along with Glenridding farmers John and Elaine Brown have all received similar letters from Transport NSW as none of them have agreed to the government's valuation and terms for acquiring their properties.

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**FRUSTRATED:** Landholders whose properties are to be compulsory acquired for the bypass Bec Hatch, Chris McNamara and Maurice Butler.



LOST: The shed on the Hatch family's property has stood the test of time but the bypass will see it demolished to make way for the roadway.

# Layzell 'a difficult time'

BY LOUISE NICHOLS

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A spokesman for Transport for NSW said they were currently working to finalise the acquisition of properties to deliver the Singleton bypass project.

"TNSW is committed to working collaboratively with property owners to enable the majority of land acquisition requirements to be completed by agreement, rather than a compulsory process," they said.

"Wherever possible, Transport for NSW seeks to complete property acquisition by a negotiated agreement. All Transport for NSW offers to landholders are based on an independent valuation.

"Where a negotiated agreement cannot be reached, the property is compulsorily acquired in accordance with

the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991. When this happens the Valuer-General is required to independently determine the amount of compensation to be paid."

Member for Upper Hunter Dave Layzell said there is significant emotion associated with any acquisition process. It is a difficult time for people as they are asked to give up their home for the greater good of the community.

"The process is a difficult one that we have needed to go through for the Singleton Bypass. Unfortunately there is great need for these important pieces of infrastructure," he said.

"I have not been able to support any requests for delaying the process nor spending more time to redesign the road. However we can't avoid the fact we are going to inflict serious change onto these

people and their lives.

"Change can be a painful process, which can lead to high emotions. On behalf of the community, I do apologise for the impact the road has on the residents and what we are asking them to do."

For vegetable grower Mr McNamara whose farm has supported two families for more than 40 years and is last of its type in the Upper Hunter the claim of no extra money is ridiculous.

"During last year's Upper Hunter by-election the Coalition government in NSW simply found \$25 million to fund the Putty Road interchange," he said.

"So why can't they find the money now to compensate us for the loss of our farms. We didn't want to sell and the route chosen has just flooded but if they are going to build the bypass through our farm

we need a true valuation."

The landholders say they are being offered substantially less from the government for their properties than the prices placed on them from independent valuers.

Land prices are skyrocketing and so is demand for good quality farming land - we were able to get back onto our properties very quickly after the flood that's how good this land is, said Mr McNamara.

"All we want from the government is the true value of these farms and compensation for the loss of income and costs of relocation. If they acquire a house they provide compensation but not for farms and that is not fair."

For the Browns their property, which has been in Mr Brown's family for more than 100 years, is not being acquired but rather impacted

by one of the bridges that will carry traffic over the floodplain and the railway line onto the northern edge of town.

"It will split our farm and probably half the property will become useless to us and can we get any reasonable compensation absolutely not," said Mrs Brown.

"Building this road through the floodplain will also have impacts as they extend the levee so we most likely will get more flooding and so will areas like Whittingham."

For Mrs Hatch she does not understand why they have to fight so hard for their rights.

"All we want is our valuation and all we have received from Transport NSW is threats we will be fined," she said.

"We have had two years of hell thanks to the bypass."