

## INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

**Organisation:** Sandy Hearn's Action Group

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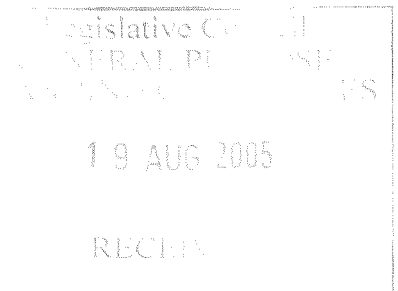
**Telephone:**

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**Subject:**

**Summary**



19<sup>th</sup> August 2005

General Purpose Standing Committee No 4  
Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades  
NSW Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

**Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades**

The following submission is made under Terms of Reference Item 3, and relates to the Pacific Highway Upgrade Sapphire-Woolgoolga (Coffs Harbour LGA) as this upgrade raises issues similar to a number of those to be examined in relation to the Ewingsdale-Tintenbar and Ballina/Woodburn upgrades.

Our submission is made with reference to the following points under Terms of Reference Item 1

- b) The level of upgrade proposed for this section and the remainder of the Pacific Highway;
- c) The impact of the highway upgrade on prime agricultural land;
- d) The potential impact of the upgraded highway on prime agricultural land in the expanded study area;
- e) The impacts of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway;
- f) The impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing of interstate and local transport;
- g) The impacts of interstate truck transport on the New England Highway;
- h) The significance of the New England Highway as a designated national transport route;
- i) Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task;
- j) The significance of statements by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road.



## **Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades**

The Sandy Hearn's Action Group (SHAG) is opposed to the R.T.A.'s proposed upgrade of the Pacific Highway for Sapphire – Woolgoolga on the grounds that it fails the test of environmental, social and economic sustainability that Coffs Harbour City Council is attempting to apply to development in the city.

In reference to specific issues raised in the terms of reference

### **b) The level of upgrade proposed for this section and the remainder of the Pacific Highway**

The upgrade is excessive because SHAG believes the RTA (or private enterprise) should be constructing a separate Motorway to carry interstate heavy vehicles and traffic and directing them in the meantime to the New England Highway with possible special fuel rebates.

A western motorway would have to have "national route status" and then the New England Highway could be downgraded to Regional Road status along with the Pacific Highway. Local Councils would then assume responsibility along with developers to upgrade specific sections on the Pacific Highway to allow for development or improve unsafe sections. The NSW and Commonwealth Governments would jointly fund the new motorway.

### **c) The impact of the highway upgrade on prime agricultural land (and other primary industries)**

Apart from prime agricultural land that will be lost in the Sapphire–Woolgoolga Upgrade the threat to fish breeding grounds adjacent to the Solitary Islands Marine Park will be, over time, intolerable.

The recreational fishing industry has just recently been recognized as being of major economic significance to the NSW and Australian economies.

Areas such as Moonee Creek and Hearn's Lake are crucial to the marine biodiversity in the Solitary Islands Marine Park. They are under enough stress as it is. The proposed upgrade will sound their death knell.

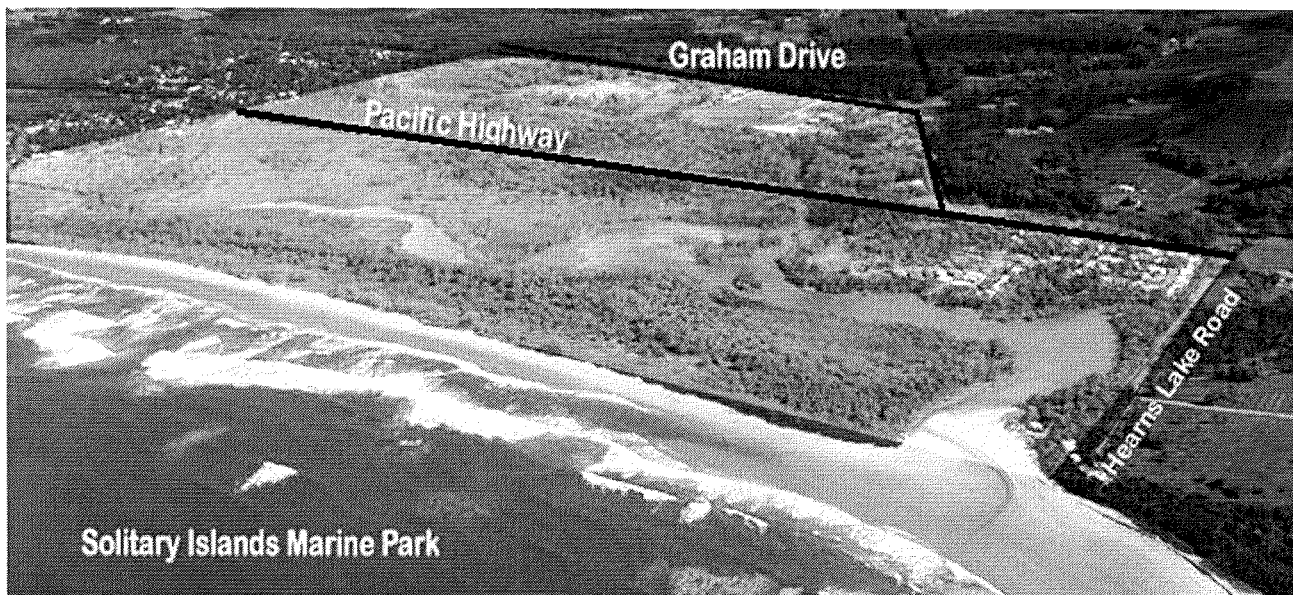
To be brutally honest the sides of the Pacific Highway are open garbage bins that are rarely emptied. The effect of plastic bags, cigarette butts, disposable nappies and take away food containers on aquatic life is devastating and well documented. Why doesn't the RTA actually clean up the Pacific Highway once in a while?

The Upgrade will cause thousands of cubic metres of acid sulphate soils located in the coastal floodplains near Hearn's Lake to be disturbed along with the removal of mangroves, riparian vegetation and threatened ecological communities for feeder roads, bridges and roundabouts.

The ongoing threat from diesel and other petrochemical pollution as the number of heavy vehicles double by the year 2025 and from the increasing volume of road trash will be environmentally unsustainable.

One hazardous chemical spill at either of the proposed bridges over Double Crossing Creek will be catastrophic for the Lake. Former Minister for Planning, Craig Knowles said “Hearns Lake is a highly sensitive coastal lagoon that is intermittently open to the sea.

Being closed much of the time, the lake is vulnerable to high nutrient loads, sedimentation and contamination, which can lead to toxic algal blooms and poor water quality.”



**Figure 1 – Hearns Lake**

The light area shows the Eastern and Western Precincts of the Hearns Lake/Sandy Beach DCP

**e) The impacts of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway f) The impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing of interstate and local transport;**

The proposed upgrade of the existing Pacific Highway from Hexham to the Tweed resembles a “join the dots” puzzle. The RTA bring in upgrades at the points of least resistance and then join them up at a later date. As a consequence B-Doubles and heavy interstate vehicles go from divided dual carriageway to poor quality commuter roads and bridges at Frederickton, Macksville and Kempsey and then back to dual carriageway. This causes many cases truck drivers flaunt local speed limits and in some cases run red lights, as has happened in Coffs Harbour recently.

The time it takes to solve the really curly issues along the current route will mean the overall project costs will blow out substantially.

Not only that but the safety issues will remain with the on again off again conditions along the Highway.

In the meantime the frustration of twice as many heavy vehicle drivers in 2025 when the Pacific Highway will be nowhere near being dual carriageway will mean more distress for local and tourist traffic as well as truck drivers.

SHAG is concerned that slower local commuter and tourist traffic does not mix with fast moving interstate transport. We share the view of Byron Councillors that interstate trucks should be directed to the New England Highway until a western Motorway is built.

A review of the Coffs Coast Advocate over the last few months reveals far too many accounts of fatal and near fatal accidents involving heavy vehicles in the Coffs Harbour area. The fact that they contribute to 25% of fatalities despite only making up 10% of the

total volume of traffic speaks for itself.

### **3. Any other related matters**

## **THE HEARNS LAKE ECOSYSTEM**

Hearns Lake is a highly diverse and important ecosystem. It is a saline coastal lake known as an ICOLL (Intermittently Closing & Opening Lakes & Lagoons). It is classified as a Significant Coastal Lake under State Environmental Planning Policy No 71 and includes

- ▶ 7 endangered ecological communities and threatened species habitats listed under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act
- ▶ habitats for migratory terrestrial and marine species
- ▶ high conservation value riparian vegetation along Double Crossing Creek as well as the lake itself
- ▶ extensive areas of very high and high conservation value native vegetation (CHCC Draft Vegetation Study)
- ▶ SEPP 26 – Littoral Rainforest in the Northern precinct of the DCP
- ▶ wildlife corridors from west of Sandy Beach to the coast
- ▶ endangered wetland coastal floodplain recognized by the State Government breeding grounds for fish crucial to the well being of the Solitary Islands Marine National Park
- ▶ a Sanctuary Zone around Flat Top Island which has the highest biodiversity of any headland in the Marine Park
- ▶ potential habitat for the endangered Wallum Froglet and other threatened species.

### **Existing Threats to the Hearns Lake Ecosystem**

The southern sections of Hearns Lake (in the Eastern Precinct) are at present heavily impacted upon by urban stormwater contamination from the existing residential areas of Sandy Beach. Algal blooms have been recorded in Hearns Lake and CHCC and EPA water quality sampling has identified pollution exceeding nationally acceptable limits in the water body. Other threats are:

- sediment run-off from earth works relating to building activity in all precincts (Eastern, Western and Northern) within the DCP
- pollution run off from building activity in all precincts, including pesticides, solvents, fertilizers, oil, excrement from cats and dogs etc
- diffuse pollution from agricultural pursuits in the Hearns Lake catchment area including west of the Pacific Highway near the Northern Precinct
- building within the recommended 100 metre buffer zone around the Lake and Double Crossing Creek

- slashing of vegetation within potential Wallum Froglet habitat in the Eastern Precinct
- clearing, draining and adding fill to coastal floodplains
- burning of land
- grazing of cattle in areas proposed for 7a Environmental Protection
- roadworks within catchment area including the proposed Pacific Highway upgrade
- effluent contamination from Colonial Surfside Caravan Park's septic system



**Figure 2.** Aerial view of Highway route through the Hearns Lake Ecosystem

## **Impact of Pacific Highway Upgrade on Hearn's Lake**

In Figure 2 all of the highway works marked in red will impact on Hearn's Lake, including major works associated with Option E (Woolgoolga Deviation).

Currently the area shown is subject to a Development Control Plan. A major upgrade through it on top of additional development foreshadowed by the DCP will be too much for the ecosystem to survive with any environmental integrity.

The RTA is proposing to compound poor town planning by expanding a Highway that undermines many sensitive coastal environments and places unnecessary stress on human health and social amenity.

SHAG is part of the Bypass Action Network, an organization representing all communities in the Northern Beaches of Coffs Harbour. The resolve of some of its members has already put back the start of construction of Option E by 18 months. This is just a small part of the Highway route. How long does the Committee realistically expect it will take to complete a dual carriageway from Sydney to the Tweed using the currently proposed RTA route.

We believe it is time to bite the bullet and admit that it will simply compound poor town planning by continuing to expand the current Pacific Highway corridor.

Hearn's Lake has already attracted the attention of the wider community and any attempt by the RTA to damage this fragile ecosystem will be met with concerted, well funded and well publicized resistance.

To coin an R.T.A. phrase;

**GO BACK. YOU ARE GOING THE WRONG WAY.**

We hope our submission may assist in a positive way with your review.

Yours sincerely

Wayne Evans (On behalf of Sandy Hearn's Action Group)