

## **INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR**

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**Date Received:** 9/11/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

# Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry & Tourism Inc.



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7 November, 2005

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

## Submission relating to Pacific Highway Upgrade Sapphire to Woolgoolga

The general purpose standing committee No 4 is conducting an inquiry into the proposed upgrade to the Pacific Highway between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga as outlined in the Coffs Harbour Planning Strategy.

### Background

The Pacific Highway from north of Hexham to the Queensland border covers a length of almost 700 kms. The road serves as a key interstate corridor for the carriage of passengers and freight as well as a link that serves a region with a population greater than 500,000. ***This population more than doubles in peak tourist season and is projected to increase to around 800,000 within 20 years.***

In 1993, the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Wal Murray, released the North Coast Road strategy, which in part identified two options for upgrading the Pacific Highway. One was to upgrade the existing Highway to a dual carriageway, which would take us roughly to the year 2020. The other option was to have a toll road from Hexham to the Queensland border, known as the Pacific motorway option.

The Pacific motorway option would have seen 600 kms of new freeway-standard highway built along an alignment away from the present highway. It would have offered the most beneficial impacts to travel time and safety, *but thought* to result in significant adverse impacts on many towns along the route that Pacific motorway would have bypassed.

Berrima, in the Southern Highlands, is testimony to the fact that the opposite is true. *"Finally, the construction of the freeway bypass (1992) has allowed the village to return to a more tranquil and beautiful setting, and countless thousands of cars and trucks no longer rumble through its streets as in the days of its position on the main southern highway"* (Berrima Web site)

Notwithstanding, in 1993 the NSW Government adopted the upgrade option, which involved "upgrading sections of the existing highway including, where justified, local bypasses of Urban Centres [RTA 1993]

This submission relates to **Option E Deviation** of Woolgoolga and examines the potential impact of the upgrades.

The issues covered include the following from Terms of Reference Item 1, and we make the following comments:

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

***Option E Deviation is not a by-pass of Woolgoolga. Option E is not an upgrade.*** This proposal is the RTA's second deviation around Woolgoolga. The first Pacific Highway By-Pass (Deviation) of Woolgoolga opened in 1963. It now passes through the middle of the urban settlement area. The second proposed deviation (consisting of 4 - 6 lanes of freeway standard 110 kph highway) would be situated only 1600 metres west of the roundabout on the existing Pacific Highway. It passes through West Woolgoolga, Country Club Estate as well as the South Woolgoolga Urban investigation area.

*The RTA has stated that Option E deviation is a short-term solution for Pacific Highway traffic management (10 - 15 years). How many by-passes, how much land, how many farms, homes, businesses and lives destroyed before the RTA get it right?*

**c. The impact of the highway upgrade on prime agricultural land**

***This coastal strip is highly productive.*** It has some of the best soil and highest rainfall in the country. Woolgoolga has a significant Sikh population who own a high percentage of the local plantations that for generations have been family run. Loss of plantations will have a significant negative impact on Sikh employment, family units and future.

*Why destroy this land and the lives and livelihood of so many people for a short-term traffic management solution?*

The survival of many banana plantations depends on shared farming infrastructure, resources and services. e.g. water source, processing equipment, labour and disease control measures. Our hilly topography plays a vital role in the microclimate of tropical fruit cultivation. Plantation and forest vegetation on slopes plays a vital role in prevention of hillside erosion. Crop spraying, access to water and other farm units will be impacted by highway cuttings. An unacceptable 35 agricultural properties will be impacted by Option E Deviation. 28 of these will become unviable [ref Connell Wagner Agriculture consultant's report].

Woolgoolga banana industry yields over \$20 million p.a. with 2.5 x flow onto industry and trading. Agriculture employs 21.5% of the local community.

*It can be seen that the loss of so many productive agricultural properties will have adverse flow-on economic impacts on the Woolgoolga business community.*

**e. The impact of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway**

In ten years to 31 December, 2003, 36 percent of all fatalities in road crashes on the non metro sections of the Pacific Highway involved articulated trucks [Back on Track, 2005].

In recent times, there has been a particularly strong growth in use of the Pacific Highway by heavy vehicles, especially since the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah Freeway [August, 2002] and the declaration of the Pacific Highway as a **B-Double route** [despite remaining substandard sections of the highway]. The Pacific Highway is also heavily used by semitrailers, as it is the shortest route between Sydney and Brisbane.

Speeding is a significant road safety issue for heavy vehicles. The results from speed surveys conducted on heavy vehicles in June 2003 and December 2003 show consistent levels of speeding with 15% of heavy vehicles travelling in excess of 100 km/h.

Heavy trucks account for 2% of NSW registered vehicles, generate around 6% of total motor vehicle travel in NSW and account for 15 - 20% of traffic counts on the Pacific Highway. Heavy trucks appear to be over represented in fatal crashes [*Pacific Highway Safety Review*].

**f. The impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing of interstate and local transport**

The RTA Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report in August, 2003 reports that approx 30% of the long distance freight on the Pacific Highway between Bulahdelah and Tweed Heads is destined for communities located along and adjacent to the highway. ***70% of the long distance freight traffic along the North Coast highway is interstate freight and has no direct benefit to local residents, businesses and other drivers using the road.***

Freight transport is forecast to double by the year 2010. As traffic volumes increase the merging of slow local traffic [farm/trade vehicles/ vista gazing tourists and an aging population] with fast through traffic at the intersections between Arrawarra and Sapphire will increase the risk of high speed collisions.

*In the long term, the safest strategy is to separate fast through traffic from the slower moving coastal traffic. The Pacific Highway is to be "upgraded" between Sapphire and Woolgoolga and will continue to carry both local and interstate traffic. A proper western by-pass is needed to separate the traffic.*

Other issues covered include the following from Terms of Reference Item 3:

**3. Any other related matters**

**Tourism**

Tourism in Woolgoolga is directly or indirectly responsible for 27% of employment and contributes at least \$19 million to the local economy.

*Option E Deviation will directly impact on established and potential bed and breakfast and other tourism accommodation. Apart from the fact that no-one wants to holiday near a freeway, noise, pollution and traffic delays will adversely impact the tourism industry (and local economy) during the four year construction period.*

**Business & Commerce**

Woolgoolga is mainly dependent on agriculture, tourism and the building trades. The massive land-take proposed for Option E will negatively impact further urban development and the

building trades. The flow-on economic impacts will ripple through to the finance and banking, and the retail sectors.

*Studies reveal Woolgoolga's dependence on passing traffic is low. A proper Western by-pass would do much to enhance Woolgoolga's economy. Option E will do much to destroy it.*

### **Community Severance**

Option E will have a major impact on cohesion between urban and rural residential communities, which will become segmented and more isolated.

### **Human Health & Wellbeing**



There will be an escalation of noise and air pollution as increased highway traffic escalates through existing and new residential neighbourhoods.

### **Landscape Disturbance**

Option E will cause major disturbance to topography affecting agriculture, scenery and the recreational value of the area.

*Plantation and forest vegetation is critical to local scenic values on which our tourism industry depends.*

### **Economic Impact**

There will be a negative impact on a 10 kilometre, 500 metre wide strip through otherwise future high value properties.

*An independent economic impact statement prepared by the Woolgoolga Area Residents Group (WAR) indicates that 960 potential home sites will be lost in the RTA land-take for Option E [this excludes land with no urban subdivision potential]. This same document clearly reveals that the proposed Coffs Harbour "upgrade" has a \$2.4 billion negative affect on the local community. This document was not given any consideration by the RTA during the route selection process - their economic data was limited to the cost of road construction.*

### **PROPOSED OUTCOMES**

The Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce calls on the State Government to make an immediate commitment to a proper Western By-Pass [or tollway] of the Coffs Coast to take the heavy volume of interstate traffic including the large [and ever increasing] volume of freight traffic away.

In addition, that the State Government to make an immediate commitment to implement improvements to the existing Pacific Highway between Coffs Harbour and Corindi, *in the interest of road safety*, but not to the scale currently proposed by the RTA. [this includes immediately ceasing further work on Option E Deviation]

This submission is made by the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Inc.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in the inquiry if this is appropriate to our interest.

Yours faithfully

Robert Forrest,  
Secretary