

**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO  
MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES**

**Organisation:** Kirklands Coaches Pty Ltd  
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**Subject:**

**Summary**

3 June 2004

#### SUBMISSION TO GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

This submission addresses some of the consequences of the Branch Line closure as they impact on Kirklands services between Lismore, Tweed Heads and Brisbane,

1. We first learned of the Countrylink Coach timetable in local press on 30 April.
2. Immediately raised our concerns with industry association – BCA and Countrylink.
3. These concerns include:
  - a. No prior consultation
  - b. No recognition of our Ministry of Transport Contracts and services.
  - c. Promotion of services beyond ‘rail replacement’.
  - d. Flood of new services – well in excess of demand.
  - e. No fare or concession equity with MoT fares/concessions.
  - f. Patronage syphoning beyond rail passengers.
  - g. Unlimited pick up/set down services across contract areas – not only Kirklands.
  - h. No attempt to replace rail jobs lost in Lismore region with local employment opportunity.
  - i. Threats to existing jobs.
  - j. Threats to our viability
  - k. Provision of services at below cost.
  - l. Services that duplicate existing Kirklands services.
  - m. Scheduled taxi service.
  - n. Cross border competition issues that penalise NSW operators.

Having highlighted these concerns I am prepared to attend a local hearing to provide further information if required.

Our company has provided extensive bus and coach services throughout this region for over 60 years and specifically between Lismore, Tweed Heads and Brisbane for over 20 years.

We hold current contracts that convey rights and performance requirements over the same area and while we face daily competition from cars, planes, rail and other coach companies it is only Countrylink that is able to operate in a ‘non commercial’ manner – for example offering \$2.20 return fares to pensioners within NSW on their coaches.

It is our understanding that Rail Corp/Countrylink were to limit these new services to rail replacement only – our concerns are directly attributable to their failure to do so - refer attach 1.

If Countrylink are intent on operating beyond Rail replacement and using their preferential (bottomless pit) government funding to provide artificially low priced travel – at prices below our costs – then so should Kirklands, the contracted operator, be equally supported otherwise their predatory actions will drive our patronage to non viable levels and we will have to cease these services, at the cost of jobs and diminished viability of our remaining business and regional services to our community.

Fare equity needs also to be considered, if Govt/Countrylink are committed to this new fare and concession ‘benchmark’ then in the interest of equity they must extend this to provide equal opportunity to all passengers travelling similar distances and provide the necessary financial support to previously viable Operators.

This predatory action of Countrylink comes at a time when the NSW Private bus operators face unprecedented State Govt actions to ‘nationalise’ our businesses, have not reimbursed operators in rural NSW for real costs incurred over the past two years - despite IPART approval and seek to reduce school bus services all via draconian legislation presently before parliament – despite the fact that private bus operators operate at half the cost level of Government buses!

As you can see we have major concerns related to on-going jobs for our people, equitable services and fares for our passengers and viability of our business and will take the opportunity of presenting same in Lismore 9 June.

Yours faithfully

Peter Shepherd  
General Manager  
(Kirklands Buslines, Lismore)