

**Submission
No 159**

INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES

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Subject:

Summary



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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4
Legislative Council
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000

gpscno4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Committee,

On behalf of FAME Support group, I submit the following.

- (a) My comment on the suggested savings by closing the Casino to Murwillumbah XPT rail service is that given the losses sustained by the whole system, in particular CityRail, \$5million seems a very trivial saving.
- (b) Following on from the above, we now have ten (10) coaches a day replacing this line – five for north-bound passengers and five for south-bound passengers. The services are operated by a Queensland company whom I understand sources nothing from New South Wales, other than its income of course. There will be no savings as 3650 coach movements a year will do more than \$5million a year damage to the already over-stressed roads in this area. Then we will be paying more for the damage done to our cars by the failing road system.

People who live in rural areas and have illnesses that are not easily treated in those areas often have to travel to major public hospitals or medical specialists in the Sydney area for treatment. In this area, we used to be able to travel to Brisbane but that has been stopped by the NSW government refusing to accept Medicare charges from Queensland. We now have a 1600+kilometre trip to Sydney for the same treatment. The train is by far the most comfortable service for us to use. Coaches are rough and one is unable to move about as needed to alleviate problems associated with our medical condition. The Pacific Highway now has a 60% increase in heavy vehicle movements following the opening of the Chinderah-Yelgun section – RTA figures, they estimated a 4% increase – and our members are afraid to use coaches as they feel that another coach disaster is just a matter of time. Driving on the Pacific Highway at 3AM is a frightening experience you never forget.

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We were able to book our tickets using the Countrylink Travel Centre at Lismore, Byron Bay and Murwillumbah. My experience is with Lismore centre which was staffed by very able staff. They knew what they were doing due to their years of experience. I also used them to book other travel, e.g., air, sea and accommodation, due to their obvious expertise and that there was no hassle from them to buy other expensive travel. On the other hand, on the one occasion I used an official Countrylink agent, immediately it was determined I only wanted a pensioner rail ticket and not a world trip I was shunted off to a junior person who had no idea what they were doing – they made no attempt to hide the fact I was a nuisance.

ANNOUNCED BY:

(c) I do recollect that when the diesel-hauled service was replaced by the XPT in February 1989, the

E/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Society of NSW Inc.

government of the day said that the line would be upgraded to allow the XPT to travel at a faster speed than the diesel-hauled service. It is no secret that in fact only essential maintenance was carried out as necessary to keep the line open. Now, 15 years later, it does need major capital works done on it. By now we should have in place an excellent track. But today, many bridges need work done on them, the line needs straightening and the track upgraded to allow the promised faster service.

A commuter service from say Mullumbimby to Lismore in peak hours could take a lot of traffic off the very crowded roads – many people who live in the Ocean Shores, Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow regions work in Lismore. Morning and afternoon peak-hour traffic on the Lismore-Bangalow Road is one continuous line of traffic, usually just the driver.

The extension of the line to the Queensland border to connect with QR would assist the viability of the line. It must also be realised that 90% of everything we buy in this area comes from Brisbane so any improvement in the connections between Brisbane and Lismore will be beneficial.

- (d) The greatest killer of potential for the XPT service was the timetable. Unpopular timetables has been used by State Rail before as a means of closing passenger services (Silver City Comet to Broken Hill). The diesel-hauled service left Sydney at 8PM, arrived at Lismore at 9AM. It was used by the people of Casino and Lismore to go to Byron Bay for the day, where it arrived at 10AM. It returned to Byron Bay at 5PM, Lismore at 6PM and Sydney at 7AM, where it connected with other services, including Melbourne. The last timetable for the XPT was completely user-unfriendly. It left Sydney at 7AM, arrived at Lismore at 7.20PM, returning at 11.30PM and Sydney at 11.45AM. I met people on the train from Sydney who had to get up at 4AM to get to Central in time for the 7AM departure because of the lack of suburban services at that hour of the day. Today the Brisbane XPT service leaves Brisbane at 6.30AM during daylight saving and there are no suburban stops! This sort of planning has to be deliberately done to discourage patronage.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my outrage at what I consider to be criminal neglect of our rail service.

Yours faithfully,

John Norman
Co-Ordinator – FAME Support Group