

Submission
No 95

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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Subject:

Summary

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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**

This submission relating to Pacific Highway upgrade(s) between Sapphire and Woolgoolga [in particular the Option E deviation of Woolgoolga] is made to the Pacific Highway Upgrades Inquiry being conducted by General Purpose No. 4 as this upgrade raises issues similar to a number of those to be examined in relation to the Ewingsdale-Tintenbar and/or Ballina/Woodburn upgrades,

The issues covered include the following from Terms of Reference Item 1:

- b. The level of upgrade proposed for this section and the remainder of the Pacific Highway**
- ☐ The highway "upgrade" is NOT an upgrade - it is a **new motorway** with a concrete footprint 200 metres wide in places and with up to 8 lanes of traffic, elevated intersections and off ramps that will create more noise problems for many residents. *[Annexure 1]*
 - ☐ The RTA preferred route will cause an economic loss to the Coffs Harbour Local Government area of about \$2.4 billion. *[Annexure 2]*
 - ☐ WAR [Woolgoolga Area Residents] Group has proposed improvements at a cost of little more than \$100 million, much less than the \$900 million cost of the RTA's plan. The savings could be put into the construction of a proper western bypass that could benefit the motorists of NSW for many years to come.
- 1. 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. Why destroy this land and the lives of so many people.
 - ☐ 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. *[Annexure 3]*

- ❑ 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 CW Agriculture consultant's report].
- ❑ Woolgoolga banana industry yields over \$20m p.a. with 2.5 x flow onto to industry and trading
- ❑ Agriculture employs 21.5% of the local community

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

- ❑ Horror stories told by countless drivers [*Annexures 4 to 15*]
- ❑ RTA NSW accident statistics [2003] show that articulated trucks [including B Doubles and Semis] are involved in 4 times as many accidents as cars per vehicle on the road [234 crashes per 10,000 for cars, 996 crashes per 10,000 for articulated trucks]. [*Annexure 16*]

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 Aug 03 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 and other drivers using the road.
- ❑ In a recent traffic count 21,514 vehicle movements were recorded in a 24 hour period - 10% of this figure was trucks. At night 30% of vehicle movements was accounted for by trucks. This figure is projected to triple over the next 15 years.
- ❑ RTA figures for the last 3 years reveal the number of fatal crashes and deaths on the Pacific Highway has increased dramatically. Although heavy vehicles accounted for only 10 % of the total number of vehicles using the Highway in 2003 they were involved in 25% of 44 fatal crashes which resulted in 56 deaths.
- ❑ 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. [*Annexure 17*]

i. Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task

- ❑ RTA has stated that Option E is a short term solution to Pacific Highway traffic management [10 - 15 years]
- ❑ The "upgrade" to the current Pacific Highway is limited to a 20 year vision by the RTA. [*Annexure 18*]
- ❑ The RTA preferred Pacific Highway Upgrade options for Coffs Harbour area are with the City and northern beaches environs and also transect the regionally important hilly coast topography impacting agriculture, tourism and dwindling wildlife habitat including that of koala and impacting wildlife linkages between the forested hillsides and Solitary Island Marine Park coastline. Any major highway upgrade between the coastal range and the beaches will have a long lasting negative impact on the viability of this coastal environment and conflict with the principles of

ecologically sustainable development. Consideration must be given therefore to a more affordable short term upgrade of the existing highway alignment until such time as a more substantial and proper bypass of Coffs Coast can be justified and funded.

j. The significance of statements by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road.

- ❑ The minister of Infrastructure Planning & Natural Resources, Craig Knowles has just refused two master plans for Hearn's Lake so as "to protect the very high ecological and environmental sensitivity of an area" *[Annexure 19]*
- ❑ Despite this, the RTA is currently proposing a large Highway turn around right near the northern buffer zone to Hearn's lake along with 3 lots of bridge works over Double Crossing Creek, the large scale removal of riparian vegetation of recognised ecological significance for off ramps and feeder roads and a huge protected coastal floodplain to go to allow for the equivalent of 6 lanes of highway. . *[Annexure 20]*
- ❑ Also refer to *[Annexure 21]*

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

3. Any other related matters

Community Concern

In July, 2005, the *Coffs Coast Advocate* [in response to the continuing carnage on the Pacific Highway between Macksville and Halfway Creek] asked the community to sign a petition imploring our State and Federal politicians to fast track the construction of the Bonville deviation and a proper by-pass or tollway to take heavy traffic well away from Coffs Harbour and its satellite communities on the Northern Beaches. *[Annexures 22, 23, 24 & 25]*

Community Consultation

Specifically, the limited community representation at the VMW; the exclusion from the VMW of upgrade options preferred by both the community and Coffs Harbour City Council indicated during the community consultation process; the discarding and/or ignoring of data prepared by technical experts on behalf of the project team and adjustment of values after detailed workshop analysis to suit a pre-conceived "popular outcome: of RTA short listed options; and the failure of the workshop to apply a genuine "triple bottom line" assessment promoted as a key methodology of the workshop.

See also *[Annexures 26 and 27]* further evidence of lack of consultation and communication.

Tourism

Tourism in Woolgoolga is directly or indirectly responsible for 27% of employment and contributes at least \$19 m to the local economy. The deviation will directly impact current and potential bed and breakfast and other accommodation. No-one wants to holiday near a freeway.

Business & Commerce

Woolgoolga is mostly dependent on agriculture, tourism and the building trades. Further urban development and building trades will be negatively impacted by the land take of Option E. Studies reveal Woolgoolga's dependence on passing traffic is low. A proper Western by-pass would enhance Woolgoolga's economy.

Community Severance

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

Flora and Fauna

There are a number of old forest remnants, ponds and watercourses vital for the survival of regionally significant flora and fauna which will be impacted by Option E deviation. If our watercourses are threatened so will be the marine park and its estuaries.

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.

Property Valuation

There will be a negative impact on a 10 kilometre 500 m wide strip though otherwise future high value properties. 960 potential home sites will be lost in the RTA land take for Option E.

Public Risk

Diesel pollution of rainwater collected from roofs for homes not on town water

Pedestrian injury caused by crossing dual carriageways between communities

HAZMAT accident risk on communities through which the highway passes.

Access by Emergency vehicle to several properties severed by Option E deviation.

PROPOSED OUTCOMES

- ❑ That the State Government makes an immediate commitment to a proper Western By-Pass [or tollway] of the Coffs Coast to take the heavy interstate traffic including the large [and ever increasing] volume of freight traffic.
- ❑ That the State Government makes 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]

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for taking our community's concerns into consideration and look forward to a favourable outcome.

Yours faithfully



Margaret Murphy