

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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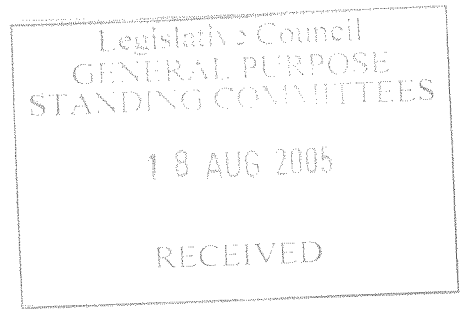
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Summary

SUBMISSION



Inquiry into the Pacific Highway Upgrades

Due: 19 August 2005

Submitted by:

Lois & Jeff East

SUBMISSION: The General Purpose Standing committee No 4 Inquiry into the Pacific Highway Upgrades

Due: 19 August 2005

Submitted by: Lois & Jeff East

RE: The proposed upgrade of the T2E (St Helena to Tintenbar) section of the Pacific Highway.

Section 1

Section 1 (a) The reasons for expanding the study area have never been adequately explained. A suggestion was made by the community that a wider study area be considered with accent on an investigation zone further west, where the population is less dense, the environment less specialized and the farms larger and therefore less individually affected by buy out. However the study area was expanded to the east where there are sensitive environmental concerns, the population is denser, the properties are more valuable and there is liable to be much greater impact on individuals due to partial buy out by the RTA.

Section 1 (b) The plans to upgrade the Pacific Highway to a 6 lane motorway are ill-thought and excessive. This is not necessary for local light traffic or interstate distance light traffic. These users only require a divided 4 lane road to increase safety. All heavy traffic and particularly long distance freight should by rights be using the New England Highway which was designed and built for that purpose. It was a great and dangerous error to gazette B-doubles to use the Pacific highway, where there is such a high percentage of local and car use.

Section 1 (c) The impact of the upgrade on prime agricultural land will be devastating if the highway does not remain in the existing highway corridor. The coastal area in the T2E zone is one of the few remaining high rainfall, high productivity soil agricultural areas remaining in Australia. It grows macadamias, coffee, beef, milk, pecan nuts, stone fruit, passion fruit and many other products. The high productivity strip is very narrow and will be destroyed if a 6 lane highway is built off the existing highway corridor.

Section 1 (d) The impact on prime agricultural land in the expanded study area will be the same as if it is in the first study area (see 1(c)), but will involve the loss of sugar cane land and environmental sites as well as affecting all properties along the ridge to a far greater degree.

Section 1 (e) The impact of B-Doubles on the Pacific Highway has been enormous. The B-Doubles with their strict time schedules, put great pressure on all other traffic to move at their speed by tail-gating and intimidation. The loss of a sense and reality of safety has been felt by all. They travel in large numbers in a very close formation, particularly at night. It no longer feels safe to drive at night on the Pacific Highway. They travel at higher speed and go over the speed limit on all down hill runs approaching a rise. They are extremely loud and their high beams lights are blinding if they flash them or forget to lower. The environment of the Pacific Highway has forever been changed while these trucks are allowed on the highway.

Section1 (f) The impacts of interstate transport on the Pacific Highway and the mixing of interstate and local transport cannot be overstated. The impact involves loss of safety and intimidation for local road users. The price can be death. Need I say more? It is totally irresponsible for such large fast moving trucks and small local vehicles to be using the same road. One has no time to waste the other might be trying to get children to school. Why have the interstate freight movers been allowed to use this old, narrow, multiple intersected highway. The heavy traffic should be out west on a large road designed for that purpose.

Section 1(g) The impact of the loss of interstate truck transport on the New England Highway is enormous as the businesses relying on many trucks refueling and stopping for meals has been lost. Many large truck stops were built and established to provide for the large numbers of trucks but since the change in gazetting this business has been lost and many operators have sold out or gone broke. This is a tragedy given all the other loss of business in the west due to drought and other farming issues. The maintenance of the New England highway as the national route must be maintained and the use of it for interstate transport must be reinstated for the survival of communities along the route.

Section1(h) The significance of the New England Highway as a designated national transport route is vital for communities along that route. There is a severe problem in this country due to decline of businesses in rural communities. One which must be maintained is that of transport. The trucks bring prosperity and business to suffering communities and it is logical that land is more available along that route where farms are large and communities small. If this route is maintained and made safe and divided then more traffic will use it for getting to major centres in an expedient way.

Section 1(i) Due to the expected increases in transport freight all the current plans for moving it seem insufficient. There is no doubt that the great rise in the cost of fuel which is already happening will make redundant many plans already in place. In the next ten years there will have to be an improvement in rail freight movement and the use of sea corridors, as these will become the only affordable systems.

Section 1(j) The fact that the Minister has stated that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road is very welcome and should by rights mean that non-local freight is moved on the western roads. The community of Australia desires to live on the Eastern coastal corridor. It chooses this due to many lifestyle issues including environment, weather and access to the ocean. The people of Australia do not choose to live on a six-lane motorway. There is no reason to put the motorway where people wish to live. It should transport people and goods to the area without going over the top of it.

Section 2

Section 2(a) If the Pacific Highway is moved off the existing corridor in the Ballina to Woodburn section then this will mean a huge loss of prime agricultural land. Australia can ill afford to reduce its agricultural , highly productive, high rainfall land to roads when the rest of Australia is losing productivity and populations due to drought and green house affects.



Section 2(b) The mid-Richmond area is known for its flooding and a motorway will have to spend huge amounts preparing for this. The only sensible plan is to make the Pacific Highway a divided four lane road on the existing corridor and send the interstate freight to the New England highway which must also be improved.

Section 2(c) The communities of Broadwater and Woodburn are small and working class. They depend on the agriculture for their livelihood. Any loss of population and farming income will devastate these communities.

Section 3

Section 3(a) Impact on Communities in the study area

Investment expectations and investment projects already undertaken by people will not be realized. Given the huge investment costs undertaken by the government for the Northern and Southern sections, it was reasonable for people to assume that the Pacific Highway upgrade would link these two areas along the existing highway corridor. Consequently in the intervening years, development plans were made and money spent by families to upgrade businesses and farms, investments which will never be recouped if the highway goes anywhere else but in the existing highway corridor. People outside the existing highway corridor are being severely and adversely affected financially and emotionally. The assets, investment decisions and livelihoods of people outside the existing highway corridor have been entombed for an indetermined time without access to compensation. The feelings of anxiety, frustration and insecurity created by the dictatorial methods currently being employed by the RTA underpin the suffering being endured. The equilibrium between amenity and land values will be destroyed.

Constructing the T2E outside the existing highway corridor will destroy the established equilibrium between amenity and land values across the whole study area. People who located on the highway should not benefit financially at the expense of other people who have paid a high financial price to locate their businesses and residences away from the highway.

Section 3(b) In respect of current urban planning zones and expected population increases

There has been no consultation with either Ballina or Byron Shire Councils with respect to current urban zoning plans particularly with respect to the Cumbalum Ridge which has been identified since the mid-1990,s as a key location for an expected housing demand of between 5,000 to 7,000 people. Putting the Pacific highway through this area would remove any possibility of achieving such an outcome for one of the most rapidly expanding shires in NSW.

The upgrade of the T2E along the existing highway corridor would preserve the integrity of the Urban Investigative zones approved by Ballina Shire Council.

Section 3(c) In regard of sensitive environmental concerns - habitats and species

Extensive environmental studies by Councils have identified, in the area outside the highway corridor, sensitive habitats and species which have been ignored by the RTA because of the lack of consultation before the study area was proclaimed. For instance, constructing a highway through identified wetlands along the bottom of the Newrybar escarpment and then cutting up through the escarpment at Coopers Shoot will destroy areas of high conservation value which have been identified by Byron Council in the documents, Biodiversity Strategy, Sept 2004 and Byron Flora and Fauna Study 1999.

Constructing a highway through these areas is a direct contradiction to one of the stated objectives (S5a) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW) put in place to encourage the protection of the environment, including the protection and conservation of native animals and plants, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities, and their habitats.

Section 3 (d) In regard of Agricultural land

The recommendations of the impending legislation, outlined in the paper, Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project, February 2005, should be adhered to, namely that, "Public infrastructure is permitted on land mapped as State or Regionally significant where no feasible alternative is available. Councils or State agencies proposing public infrastructure on such land should select alternative sites where possible".

That site is available and it is the existing highway corridor.

Rous Water has also indicated [Rous Water Council meeting, May 18, 2005] that the highway upgrade can take place on the existing highway corridor without compromising water quality provided proper engineering guidelines are followed.

Section 3(e) In regard of the status of the Pacific highway

Under the guidelines of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, Mr. Craig Knowles said that the Pacific Highway was a designated Regional Highway. He clearly stated that the Pacific Highway's function was to operate as the North Coast's primary inter- and intra- regional road traffic route. The purpose of the Pacific Highway was for regional transport (Sydney, 03 August 1998).

In the past three years since Mr. Costa allowed B-Doubles to travel the Pacific Highway, without community consultation and against its own guidelines, there have been exponential problems associated with the mixing of inter-state heavy transport with local and tourist traffic. The Pacific Highway has become the pseudo- National Highway at community expense.

Returning interstate heavy freight to the New England National Highway would have an immediate beneficial effect on road safety and community amenity and return the Pacific Highway to its original intended status, that of a Regional Highway. It took ten years to determine the original study area and then three months to extend it, largely based on submissions lodged for the Bangalow Bypass in 2000. At best, this was negligent and at worst, fraudulent.

Constructing the T2E upgrade within the highway corridor will help restore flagging public confidence in government policies and processes. It will also save millions of dollars. Further, it will give a much needed sense of security to people who have had their lives put in limbo and now face years of uncertainty.

Section 3(f) In regard of the cost

Construction costs will be greatly increased if the T2E upgrade is located outside the existing highway corridor, the final, total cost of the upgrades for the T2E upgrade, the Ballina Bypass and the St. Helena/Ewingsdale section will be increased by many millions of dollars representing a significant waste of tax payers, money. Land from Emigrant Creek (North of Knockrow) to the Bangalow overpass is already zoned 9A for highway upgrade. Land has already been acquired in the Ballina Bypass sector. The Bangalow section which has already been upgraded at a cost of \$19million is part of this corridor and will become redundant if the corridor route is not followed. The studies already done for the Ballina Bypass and the St.Helena/Ewingsdale section will need to be redone.

The Ballina Bypass to the south and the Ewingsdale/St. Helena/Bangalow section to the north which have already undergone extensive studies at considerable expense and been signed off on, have been put on hold.

Section 3(g) In regard to Safety and possible delays

Any extended process to move the highway from its existing corridor will delay and extend the period of extreme danger in which we are currently living. There are major restrains to building a highway in all area off the highway which will cause delay.

Section 3(h) In regard to Noise

see attached document

Section 3(i) In regard to the flawed process

See attached document

In conclusion I ask the committee to recommend:

1. that the Pacific Highway be improved to a 4 lane divided road within the existing road corridor;
2. that B-Doubles be ungazetted from using the Pacific highway;
3. that all long distance heavy freight use the New England Highway;
4. that the New England Highway be upgraded to a 4 lane divided road within its existing road corridor.

Signature *L. H. East - J. H. East*

Date 15-08-05