

Submission
No 12

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR

Organisation:

Name: Mr R.J. Christopher

Telephone:

Date Received: 3/11/2005

Subject:

Summary

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No: 4
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to add my voice of concern to the many locals who have expressed dismay and anger at the condition of the Pacific Highway, and who are exasperated and angry at the way in which planning for the future of the highway is being undertaken.

It does not need me to tell members of the committee that the condition of the highway in my local area is a disgrace. It is hard to comprehend that after all of the talk and promises - and all of the taxes collected from motorists in this State - that sections of the Pacific Highway are the same as they were 100 years or more ago.

One example of this in our area comes immediately to mind. There is a bridge on the highway about 200 metres south of the turn off to Crossmaglen and Valery which is for motorists crossing the highway from the Bonville hall area. This bridge narrows the Pacific Highway to probably its narrowest throughout its entire length. Not only is the highway dangerously narrow at this point, but also the bridge itself is constructed from rough-hewn tree trunks that were used for bridge construction in the 1800s. I have been unable to determine when the bridge was constructed, but I would suggest that it is not the type of construction one should expect to see on any highway in Australia in 2005 let alone Australia's major north south route.

There are many other examples like this and I am sure that other members of the local community will point these out to the committee in their submissions. Perhaps a journey by car by members of the committee along the highway will enable them to see for themselves the pitiable and dangerous condition of the road. Indeed, I will be interested to read in your report what parts of the highway the members of the committee actually had a look at, and whether or not members of the committee travelled by motor vehicle on any part of the highway between Hexham and the Queensland border.

Since the completion of the Yelgin to Chinderrah by-pass more than 18 months ago - and the accompanying approval for B-doubles to use the highway - the noise level for people living in proximity of the highway in the Coffs Harbour area has risen to unacceptable levels. Any one living on a down hill stretch of the highway suffers doubly with the noise of compression braking on the down hill side and the exhaust noise of huge trucks climbing on the uphill side. It was my understanding that the then Minister said that a review would be undertaken at the end of a year to determine the effect of the new by-pass on residents living to its south. I have not seen or heard of this review either being carried out or having been completed.

I have been involved on several occasions in the "consultation process" that has taken place over the past five or six years between residents, the Coffs Harbour City Council and representatives of the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA). I would be praiseworthy in calling that process laughable. It might have allowed some people to get a few things off their chest, but it was anything but a "consultation process".

I would contend that the "consultation process" was nothing more than a cynical exercise by the RTA to try to appease concerned citizens with legitimate grievances by giving them an outlet for those grievances while at the same time knowing full well that the plans for the highway were already in place and that any legitimate concerns would not stand in the way of those plans.

I live on the Pacific Highway just north of Coffs Harbour and whenever my wife or I travel in either direction by motor vehicle we have to contend with the unbelievable traffic conditions that exist on the highway. Some nights we have been forced to wait while upwards of 10 B-doubles pass our driveway before we can get onto the road. All day and all night the noise level remains a constant roar of truck and motor vehicle exhausts. For those of us who live in the northern beach suburbs - and for many who live in the city area and or the south- even a very short trip is a nightmare of struggles with trucks and constant through traffic.

When we bought our place, the Yelgan to Chinderrah by-pass was not completed so those who argue that those of us who bought property along the northern beaches of Coffs Harbour knew when we bought those properties that the noise level and traffic levels would be high are mistaken. We were not told that the opening of the by-pass would mean more than 600 additional trucks would pass our front door every day - most of the additional traffic being B-doubles!!!

I contend that the people of Coffs Harbour deserve better treatment from their Government than they are getting in respect of the planned Pacific Highway upgrade. It would seem to many of us that the RTA - which if reports of recent events are any indication is a law unto itself - has upgraded small sections of the highway between Coffs Harbour and Urunga with a view to arguing that it cannot do anything but upgrade the existing highway through Coffs Harbour because of the money already spent on existing short-stretch upgrades.

An example of this is the six kilometres upgrade south of the city through what was Lindsay's cutting. Surely the Bonville by-pass - where all of the accidents have been occurring in recent years - was a far more important and deserving stretch of highway to upgrade than the road through Lindsay's cutting. The cost of that stretch - at \$11 million a kilometre - seems to fly in the face of the argument of the RTA that it would be too expensive to route the Pacific Highway inland from Coffs Harbour.

As part of the "consultation process" it was pointed out to those who attended the meetings that existing upgrades would have to be taken into account in planning for the full upgrade of the highway. The members of the committee would be aware that there has been almost universal condemnation of the continued promotion of a "highway upgrade" by the Government and the RTA and that the views of the community and those people who would be affected by an upgrade have been given short shrift. There is universal agreement among everyone but the government and the RTA that Coffs Harbour does not need a highway it needs a proper by-pass similar to the bypasses of Taree, Port Macquarie and Newcastle.

I look forward to reading your considerations of these issues when the committee delivers its report of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.J. Christopher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

R.J. Christopher