

**Submission
No 29**

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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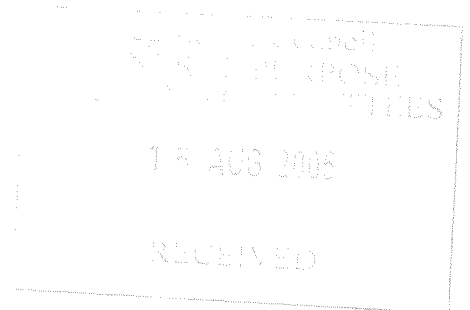
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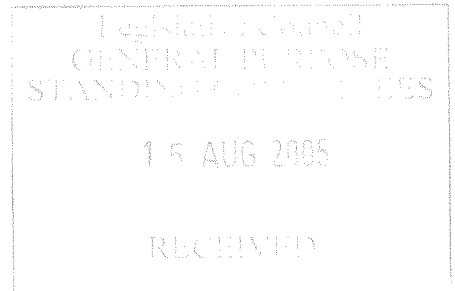
Summary

This submission outlines the issues involved in upgrading the highway between Tintenbar and Ewingsdale and supports the Coastal Plain route, so as to not destroy productive state significant farm land, water catchment and many people lives and livelihoods. The coastal route will be less costly, safer and easier to engineer, and apart from sending Trucks west and upgrading the rail, is the only sensible choice.



**SUBMISSION REGARDING HIGHWAY UPGRADE
TINTENBAR TO EWINGSDALE
August 2005**

Persons making submission: Helen and Alan Craig



**To :
The Parliamentary Committee inquiring into the impact of proposed
Pacific Highway upgrades.**

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BACKGROUND:

We have been residents and land holders in the Newrybar district for a period of 19 years, and remain primary producers in the area. Residing in this area has provided a full picture of the area, its level of productivity and its needs. We have seen the building and introduction of the new section of highway from Chinderah to Yelgan and agree that this improved section has greatly enhanced the safety of motorists in that section, but has actually made other sections of the highway more dangerous , as we have detailed below.

TRUCK TRAFFIC ON PACIFIC HIGHWAY:

Regrettably the upgrade of the road has meant a **significant growth in truck use on the highway**, which causes less problems on the upgraded section, but creates even more unsafe conditions on the areas which have not been upgraded. We have seen frequent tailgating, and forcing of motorists off the road by B Double trucks to the point that many fear for there lives being on the road at the same time as the trucks. And the noise is considerably greater than ever before. Of further concern is that once the Ballina to Ewingsdale section is completed, even bigger and longer trucks will take over this highway, as roundabouts will be eliminated, and the motorist's safety as a result, may not be greatly enhanced. In fact **safety for the average motorist will be decreased** because of the increased truck flow and the intimidating tactics they pursue to get their loads to the designated destination on time.

MAKING THE HIGHWAY SAFER WITH LESS TRUCKS:

We consider the following things should be further explored when considering upgrading of the highway :

1. Improve the New England Highway to encourage the trucks to take the inland route.
2. Building a tollway from Coffs Harbour to Beenleigh, west of the coastal areas, (eg The Summerland Way) to keep the volume of trucks to the west.
We have been told that many of the western towns such as Casino and Kyogle would welcome better transport routes as it builds their local infrastructure.
3. Consider the absolute neglect of our rail system- we have a line that could be reinstated and joined to QLD. The way in which the northern link of the NSW rail system was terminated was totally without research and consultation. Surely upgrading the rail system and getting trucks off the road needs attention. No other developed country terminates sections of their rail services in such a manner as the NSW government has. We should be expanding the system to reduce highway traffic not reducing it. It seems absurd that we can now have a railway from Adelaide to Darwin, but we don't have a link joining NSW to QLD. This is beyond belief.
4. In combination with the above strategies consider then just upgrading the sections of the highway where the safety/ black spots occur and basically keep to the existing route, without interfering with prime land in surrounding areas.

INFLUENCES ON PROPOSED ROUTES:

If there is no possibility of anything other than a complete upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Tintenbar to Ewingsdale interchange, then **the preferred route must be the coastal plain (Newrybar Swamp route) from Sandy flat through to a tunnel at St Helena.** The reasons why this coastal

route is preferred by us are the following:

1. Impact on primary production minimised- There are mostly large cane farms on low lying ground which will be effected with a coastal plain route, compared to the escarpment hinterland which has the most productive agricultural land in the state. We are aware that the federal government is wanting many cane farms phased out at present, due to gluts in the world market for sugar. The government is actively encouraging these farmers to diversify to other primary production to survive in farming.

Whereas the escarpment hinterland has been gazetted as the most important agricultural land in our state. It has been termed “state significant” land for agricultural use. It produces stone fruit, macadamia nuts, pecan nuts, coffee, beef cattle, dairy, bananas, lychees, blueberries. The area around Newrybar township and bangalow reputedly produces the best quality macadamia nuts in Australia and the best boutique coffee. The escarpment hinterland is the “food bowl of Australia” in terms of its capacity to produce, with its rich volcanic soils, and its sub tropical climate.

2. The route can be made straight and flat on the coastal plain, by tunnelling through 2 ridges with no other hills to consider, which will considerably reduce noise to surrounding residents Consistent level ground does not result in the air braking noise pollution that results when trucks tackle inclines and descents.

This is the type of noise residents living within 2km of the highway have to tolerate now. This is significantly more noise than was present 3 years ago.

3. The number of residents effected would be considerably less on the coastal route than on the escarpment hinterland. Populations are widespread

on individual properties of large size in the coastal plain, with only ridge tops being slightly more densely populated (ie 5-10 acre lots). The hinterland escarpment area has large farming areas but also has townships and properties with residences and businesses along the highway sections, including the townships of Newrybar and Bangalow. Many more people would be effected by noise and pollution than those in the coastal plan, not to mention the increased costs in buying land in the escarpment hinterland, which is significantly more valuable than the coastal plain.

4. **Engineering:** The Chinderah to Yelgan section has clearly demonstrated that well built up roads through **low lying areas work well** and if designed well and if elevated they become unaffected by flood. This same design could be used in the coastal plain.

5. Despite concerns from residents looking out over the coastal plain, a flat straight section of road will be **less noisy** than our present highway, and will not interfere with the panoramic views of escarpment residents. This has been shown by the similar situation in the Tyagarah Brunswick highway section, where residents have reported to us that the highway noise has not become an issue at all.

6. **Water quality.** On the escarpment there is a huge area of water catchment into Emigrant creek, which provides the water supply for Ballina and Lennox Head. We have always been restricted in our use of our land (eg no piggeries), as we live in the water catchment zone, due to this water catchment taking priority over everything. And as WATER is a growing topic of concern in Australia, we must preserve what we have which is an enormously productive catchment. It does not need more pollutants from

more road works and more vehicles, let alone dangerous oil or chemical spills. There is a draft Environmental plan being prepared by Ballina Council to further improve and protect the water catchment in our area. Rous Water which controls the water in our area is against any move which degrades this catchment and is in fact taking active steps to enable farmers to further protect the water catchment from pollutants. It is laughable to suppose that a 6 lane highway through the catchment will have no impact, when the farmer is being encouraged to prevent his stock from drinking from the creek. To suppose that cattle accessing the creek will have more impact than road works and road run off, not to mention oil and chemical spills is absurd.

7. Constructing a highway on the coastal plain will not interfere with present **traffic flow whilst it is being built**, whereas it would have major impact if trying to construct it on or near the existing highway. This is therefore a safety issue.

FURTHER COMMENTS:

1. Ballina Council

It has come to our notice that the mayor of the council is trying to change the Ballina proposed route to take it through productive agricultural land instead of a piece of land "proposed" for development. This land is proposed but not developed. The Ballina route should only be altered to link into the proposed coastal route through Newrybar Swamp land . Ballina residents have had years of worry and negotiation regarding the route and this should not be altered because the Catholic church wants to make more money by land development.

2. The Process

The RTA appears to have a tried and true technique for putting highways through the middle of communities. DIVIDE and CONQUER. The process of designating a study area which does not look at all options and the expansion of that area has led us to a situation where communities are divided. This is so destructive to the fabric of our society. The RTA has appointed and then dismissed and then reappointed new Community liaison officers, which unequally represent the community. Not only that, community liaison representatives are now signing confidentiality documents to not relay discussions of their liaison meetings to the community they represent. Many of the Community liaison representatives are biased to the extreme and do not represent the views of others living within a few hundred metres of each other. And so the loudest and most political lobbyists override the rest of the community. The process is seriously flawed.

3. The rural areas on the Far North coast cannot be subdivided into parcels of less than 100 acres. This ruling has developed due to the expansion of residential areas into prime agricultural land. This restriction on our ability to divide up our land, is accepted by the rural community as good in principle. It means that we do have significant farm land to pass on to our children- there is a heritage factor. It also preserves primary production in this popular and productive area.

Yet the RTA can override a significant ruling regarding subdivision and slice right through the middle of farms breaking them into pieces and making them unworkable.

SUMMARY

In Conclusion, after attending all the meetings, our considered opinion is that the Coastal plain is the preferred route. But, our gut feeling is that the trucks should be on the gazetted route- the New England Highway, and not creating the dangers they do on the Pacific Highway.

In upgrading the highway fully, the three points of importance are:

SAFETY

COST

ENGINEERING

All 3 of these points are better met with the coastal plain route.

We hope you will consider these points seriously in your investigations, and that the best route, the COASTAL PLAIN is recommended to the RTA for construction of a new highway, preserving state significant agricultural land and preserving water and farms for our future.

Yours Sincerely

Helen and Alan Craig
12/8/05