

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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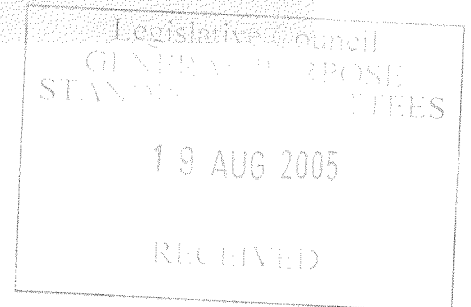
Date Received: 19/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 4



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC (*Chair*)
(*The Nationals*)

Ms Sylvia Hale MLC (*Deputy Chair*)
(*The Greens*)

The Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC
(*Australian Labor Party*)

The Hon David Clarke MLC
(*Liberal Party*)

Mr Ian Cohen MLC
(*The Greens*)

The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC
(*Australian Labor Party*)

The Hon Amanda Fazio MLC
(*Australian Labor Party*)

Inquiry into and report on the impact of the proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway between: Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, with particular regard to the following issues:

1a) “reasons for expanding the highway upgrade study area on the St Helena to Tintenbar section”

I appreciate the opportunity to address the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 on the impact of proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway – specifically item 1 a) on the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar (T2E) upgrade.

1a) “reasons for expanding the highway upgrade study area on the St Helena to Tintenbar section”

EMIGRANT CREEK DAM WATER CATCHMENT

The original study area incorporated a narrow section of land connecting the southern end of the Brunswick Heads to Ewingsdale upgrade (already built) to the proposed northern section of the Ballina bypass (not yet built). It is clear that the RTA teams that did the work on those previous two sections of the highway upgrade did not give significant thought to the 17 kilometre gap connecting the two.

This land, which is all above the escarpment along this 17 kilometres of original study area is a totally different land form to that north or south; for that matter it is different from any other between Sydney and Brisbane. It has extremely high agricultural value but perhaps even more importantly the southern section is an integral part of the water supply system to the growing towns in the area.

The towns of Lismore, Byron Bay, Alstonville, Ballina, Lennox Heads along with others are supplied with water through an overriding organization set up from amongst the local councils – Rous Water. It sources water from two catchments, Rocky Creek and Emigrant Creek. Both are extremely small in areal extent. Rocky Creek is close to pristine and supplies most water. Emigrant Creek is more degraded but supplies essential supplemental water to Ballina and Lennox Head – both as you know are growing extremely quickly.

In 1987 all land in the Emigrant Creek catchment was rezoned 7 (c) Environmental Protection (Water Catchment Zone). Essentially there is limited if any development allowed and no subdivision. The tightening of regulations continues today with Draft Environmental Plan Amendment No 49. Emigrant Creek Water Catchment currently being enacted by Ballina Council.

It would seem remarkable that the continuous operation to freeze development in the catchment and then to discuss putting a major highway through it might not at the very least make this RTA study team reconsider the width of the study area when it was brought to their notice.

I think in the general context of these discussions both in the community and amongst people a little more remote like yourselves the word upgrade is extremely unfortunate. The Pacific Highway improvement plans of the RTA call for provisions for 6 lanes plus side strips for bicycles and / or safety plus significant batters where required. In their made recent work in areas of hills and gradient this calls for a width of plus 100 metres. In the T2E stretch above the escarpment there are 80 – 100 farm accesses to the existing highway which would mean the additional requirement of at least one, and in some parts two local traffic roads. These local roads would be the width of the current Pacific Highway so that this complete construction would cut a mighty swathe through the catchment – in part more than 150 metres wide.

Not surprisingly management of Rous Water oppose the new highway going through the Emigrant Creek catchment. That's their job. The councilors on Rous Water took a wider view. Therefore the formal position of Rous Water is that they would prefer the highway not go through the Emigrant Creek catchment but if necessary NO closer to the Emigrant Creek Dam than the current highway.

It has now become clear from the preliminary geotechnical work done by the RTA consultants that the new highway cannot avoid Emigrant Creek catchment and stay

General Purpose Standing Committee No 4

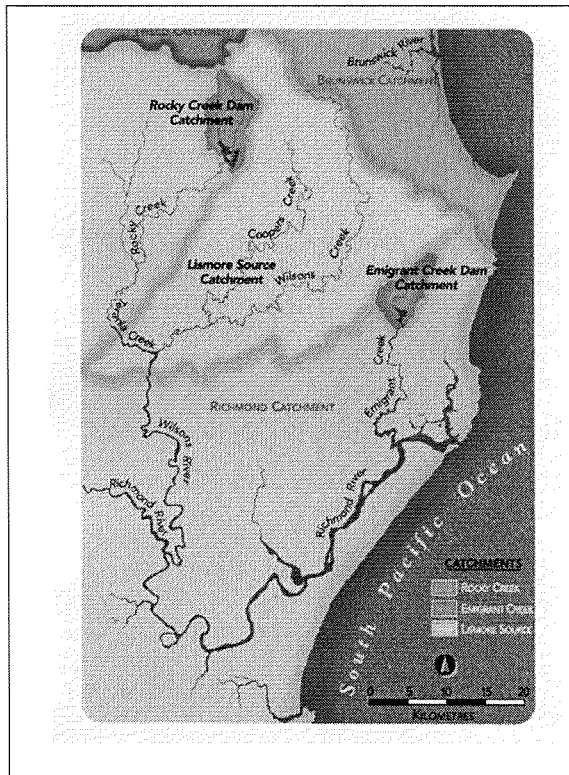
above the escarpment because the extremely small strip of land between the catchment and the escarpment edge is geologically too unstable. Hence the necessity to widen the study area substantially to the East. Widening the study area to the west just impacts more of the Emigrant Creek catchment.

Since the 1987 rezoning to Environmental Protection (Water Catchment Zone) some residents of the area have incorporated very significant riparian zone rainforest, regeneration in their activities. One family has spent over \$500,000 on rainforest regeneration of 4 kilometres of Emigrant Creek and tributaries. This work, done in 1992, has slowly built and with the assistance of Rous Water, a majority of the catchment residents together with the water drinkers of Ballina are combining to make a submission for a large grant from the Federal Government to return all the riparian zones of Emigrant Creek and tributaries to as close to their pristine state as possible.

With this information having being brought to the attention of Mr Shane Higgins at the time of the community consultative meetings in November and December 2004, it would seem that it would have almost been a dereliction of duty not to bring this to the attention of his superiors. The decision of the RTA and its Minister to extend the study area of this section of the Highway was necessary to give due regard to the catchment and provide for highway upgrade options outside this valuable natural resource.

Information supplied by: Surrey Bogg

Attachments : 2



The catchment map above from Rous Water's "The Lismore Source Newsletter – The Source 4" gives some idea of the small extent of the area of both Rocky Creek Dam and Emigrant Creek Dam catchments.

Given the very tight environmental, and restrictive land use and development conditions applied by government authorities to the two functioning catchments, it may seem unlikely that the additional Lismore Source Catchment (Howards Grass) will see the light of day given the very large population in the area that would be affected by the prevailing catchment provisions.