

Submission
No 6

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

Name: Ms Deborah Sharp

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Subject:

Summary

I am a resident of the Byron Shire in Northern NSW, an area under intense pressure from tourism and development. Since the opening of the Pacific Highway upgrades this pressure has become even more intense.

I live about half a kilometre from the highway and have appreciated the fact that this section needed upgrading desperately, as it was a death trap and many people have lost their lives on this particular section of road. My issue is not with this; my issue is with the continuing pattern of lies and deception perpetrated by the RTA on the residents in the vicinity of this highway and its subsequent use as a major freight route due to these upgrades without any community consultation.

In 1997 I had a meeting on my verandah with some RTA representatives about the proposed new upgrade. I was told, as we were sipping cups of tea, that the background noise I was hearing was tyre noise and that with the 'new' road surface this would be lessened. Instead the RTA used a random grooved concrete surface, which has increased the noise by 4.5db (as stated in their own documents), a sound intensity 180% higher or 2.8 times that of open-graded bitumen.

Pavement type is a key issue in the level and nature of noise generated by traffic, tyre/road interaction represents the primary source of noise for all constant speeds in excess of around 40 to 60 km/h. The spectral energy evidenced in the concrete pavement spectra is greatest in the frequency range where human auditory response is the most acute. In 1992 the Minister for Roads in England announced new measures to combat the problem of road traffic noise, the most significant of which was to **cease using concrete on main roads**. One has to wonder why, apart from the cost, the RTA and the government continue to use this surface when they know it will increase noise severely. Residents were blatantly misled by the RTA in the initial stages of consultation. To knowingly use this pavement and to misrepresent the end result as being a quieter surface, is a gross disregard for people's intelligence, quality of life and amenity.

I did have some noise at my place, but it was a background "white" noise that was relatively easy to live with. The level of noise we are now being subjected to has severely impacted on many people's lives, residents as far as four kilometers away are complaining of the increased noise and intensity of the noise. To make matters worse, since the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah By-pass, we are now subjected to a 30%, possibly more increase in heavy traffic with B-doubles which used to travel the New England Highway, now roaming the Pacific Highway day and night with their increased engine capacity and tyre noise.

State Government legislation "*Route Assessment Guidelines for B-Doubles and Road Transport*" February 2000, states that an impact statement is necessary before gazettal of the Pacific Highway for use by B-Double transport. (See Sec 5.2 *Route Assessment and Consultation – Copies of Assessment Criteria*). The RTA's Environmental Impact Assessment used data gathered for noise level modeling collected from 17 June to 27 June 2002, the quietest time of the year for tourist traffic and two months before the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah by-pass and the arrival of B-Doubles on the highway. Clearly, this model is inadequate both in its timing, the model used and its application. The Act states that safety, technical, economic and environmental issues, along with any community concerns, should be addressed in that assessment. This was not done.

Why have B-Doubles been allowed onto the highway without community consultation and approval? They may be safe on this section of the highway, but what about the sections not upgraded, there have been numerous accidents involving them all along the highway. There is nothing like travelling the Woodburn to Wardell stretch of the Pacific Highway with a B-double on your tail and another coming in the other direction. Even in this section with double lanes, they are still a worry. It seems that none of them stick to the 100km speed limit, some tail gate and they travel in long noisy convoys at 5am in the morning.

Why is the Pacific Highway, the most populated road in Australia and a major tourist route, allowed to be used as a major transport route, impacting severely on peoples amenity and safety of life?

When governments are concerned about road freight tripling in the next twenty years with associated traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions increasing dramatically, as stated in the Auslink Green Paper, the need for a more environmentally sustainable and higher performing national transport network is now. When freight traffic is the major cause of road wear and an increase in road freight traffic of the magnitude forecast has significant implications for the costs of road construction and maintenance, it makes sense to use the alternative, rail.

Sincerely,

Debbie Sharp