

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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Telephone:

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Subject:

Summary

Pacific Highway Inquiry - Matthew Jamieson
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1 Attachment, 179 KB

Pacific Highway Upgrade Inquiry

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

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Please note a hard copy of this submission is also sent. This includes photocopies of the documents in the appendices 3, 5& 6 which could not be attached electronically. Please attach these photocopies electronically to my submission, if this is possible.

Matthew Jamieson
Sunforest
Organic farm on the red soil above Byron Bay

*Please note change in Appendix numbering 4a on page 9, & 35 instead of 5.
MJ*

Submission to Inquiry Legislative Council into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Matthew Jamieson

Sunforest Organic Farm,

Introduction

I am organic farmer of free-range turkeys, stonefruit and macadamia at McLouds Shoot, west of St Helena. I access my property via Browns Crescent directly onto the Pacific Highway, about 70 metres south of the Coolomon Scenic Drive turnoff.

The Pacific Highway has a major importance for our commerce. Sunforest, my business, runs a refrigerated truck and regularly send farm produce & supplies on heavy interstate transport.

Summary of Concerns

The current situation on Pacific Highway requires urgent action by the NSW Government to safeguard the public on non upgraded sections of the Pacific Highway.

(i) Regulation of trucks on non-upgrades sections

The history of accidents on the St Helena corner demonstrate, that RTA policy and administrative responses on Pacific Highway do not have a capacity to safeguard the driving public.

The community along the Pacific Highway does not support the use of the Pacific Highway as a route for heavy transports and interstate freight.

B Doubles are not suited to drive the Pacific Highway on non-upgraded sections, such as Tintenbar to St Helena and should be redirect to the New England Highway. The assessment & Gazettal process for B Doubles was an inherently flawed process.

The current pattern of road use on the Pacific Highway, since the opening of Yelgin to Chinderah on August 4 2002, increases the likelihood of serious accidents involving heavy transports.

The concept of slowing constructing a series of new Pacific Highway upgrades for the next 10 years while allowing heavy interstate transport to mix with local traffic is not acceptable to the community.

While the large volumes of heavy transport continue to share the road with local traffic on

non-upgraded section serious accidents will occur. Heavy interstate traffic can be directed back to the New England Highway by the Government virtually overnight to reduce this safety risks.

(ii) Lack of Adequate Strategic Planning in RTA program

The RTA plan to upgrade the Pacific Highway in ten years has transformed into a serious of ad hoc decision, which appear to serve the freight industry but do not serve the community on issues of safety and noise.

The heavy transport oriented upgrade which current RTA is planning in Byron & Ballina Shires is a very expensive and does not have community support.

(iii) Community oriented planning of Pacific Highway

Addressing what the road should be used for has a large bearing on how the highway should be upgraded. A road built to accommodate a heavy transport corridor will be need to be much flatter, require more earthworks and is substantially more expensive to build.

Rationalisation of road transport will occur due to fuel cost and pressure to reduce greenhouse emissions. The future transport systems must incorporate a strategic change to fuel-efficient transportation systems.

Planning to Highway on existing route though the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale section:

- will minimise impacts on agricultural land and businesses. A new Highway route has the potential to impact a dynamic and profitable area of Australian agriculture and processing;
- will produce best environmental outcome by impacting terrestrial and aquatic ecology;
- does not pass through fog effected areas in Tinderbox valley and Newrybar swamp pose potential for increased accidents and concentrating pollution in an inversion layer.

The community along the Pacific Highway would support a concept of the Pacific Highway as a 'Tourism & Coastal Link Corridor'.

The CLG has not been a process through which the community is allowed to develop a plan for transport options affecting the Pacific Highway and the north coast. The Roads Minister needs to recognize this and provide a suitable process for the community to be involved in developing a transport strategy.

The NSW Minister for Roads needs to initiate a strategic planning process that can fulfill passenger and freight needs on the north coast and develops coherent strategy for moving freight between Brisbane & Sydney.

Australian agriculture is facing major economic impediments from cost of transport over land. Investment in rail appears to be a very good option for reducing comparative freight costs for agricultural commodities and increasing profitability.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

My submission to the enquiry addresses matters detailed in Section I of the Terms of reference. I commenting on this matter I will address each term in order.

I) Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, with particular regard to the following issues:

a) Reasons for expanding the highway upgrade study area on the St Helena to Tintenbar section;

I was a member of the CLG since its inception. At the time that a request was made within the CLG to extend the study area I abstained from voting.

At the time of the suggestion to extend the study area, onto the cane land in the east, I decided I had insufficient information to make an informed judgment. I had already stated a position that community was best served by the Pacific Highway staying within its existing corridor. I abstained from voting.

I held a belief that all members of the CLG were able to express their opinions without the need for a vote. Voting on resolution of extension of the study area did not appear to get support from a clear majority of CLG members.

The new CLG have a majority of people who have stated they want the Pacific highway to stay on its existing route for the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar upgrade. It has been a benefit for the community and the issue to have the new CLG representing a wider area.

b) The level of upgrade proposed for this section and the remainder of the Pacific Highway;

(i) Regulation of trucks on non-upgrades sections

The older undivided sections of the Pacific Highway are currently a very dangerous place to drive. Using the my local area as an example I want to demonstrate what needs to be done on this specific section and provide a outline of initiatives which can make the road safer over its entire length.

I believe the current RTA regulation of the Pacific Highway fails because:

- the older undivided sections of the Pacific highway does not have the design capacity for the volume of heavy transport and light vehicular traffic that uses it;
- heavy traffic is not being regulated for speed & behavior to an extent which makes the Pacific Highway safe for other users of the Highway;

I have written to the Roads Minister concerning these matters, but have not received a substantive reply. Please see my letters to the Roads Minister 4 February 2005 & 4 May

2005 in Appendix 1 & 2, which give details of how the interaction of heavy transport and other traffic on the Bangalow to St Helena section is dangerous to Road users.

The main issues my letter to the Roads Minister of 4 February 2005 where:

The Bangalow to Ewingsdale section of the Pacific Highway does not have the design capacity for the combined volume of passenger traffic & interstate transports.

Danger at turnoffs

All the turnoffs on the Bangalow to Ewingsdale section of highway have become hazardous as stationary turning vehicles are at risk of collision from heavy transports traveling at high speed on curving roads.

Southbound vehicles usually have to stop and turn into Coolomon Scenic Drive. These vehicles are liable to have a head on collision from north bound trucks and cars which overtake other north-bound local traffic which slows & turns left into Coolomon Scenic Drive.

High-speed Traffic Maneuvers The interaction of passenger traffic with slower heavy transport and high-speed heavy transport is causing passenger traffic and heavy transports to undertake dangerous traffic maneuvers.

Slopes & Curves

The speed & slopes through this section of winding terrain make control of laden heavy transports and particularly B Doubles an issue.

Road Surface

The apparent slipperiness of the road surface particularly on curves and slopes in wet weather over the Bangalow to Ewingsdale section of the Highway is a danger to all motorists.

The recommendations of this letter, 4 February 2005, to rectify the situation on the Bangalow to St Helena section of the Pacific Highway were:

1/ RTA should erect safety barriers and widen turning & passing lanes on the Pacific Highway turnoffs at Possum Creek Rd, Sunnycrest Lane, Fowlers Lane, Browns Crescent, Coolomon Scenic Drive & St Helena Road;

2/ Speed should be limited through the Bangalow to Ewingsdale Highway section to 80 kms/h. Speed should be also reduced to 70 kms/h for the Coolomon Scenic Drive turnoff and the crash prone corner below St Helena turnoff. During wet weather the crash prone corner below St Helena turnoff should be limited to only 50 km/h;

3/ Permanent speed camera should be installed at St Helena turnoff & the corner below St Helena turnoff. Video of traffic should be installed 100 meters above St Helena Road (relates to recommendation 5);

4/ The minister should reverse the gazettal of B Double traffic on Pacific highway through Byron Shire. Heavy transport use should be limited to those vehicles, which are servicing the community and industries of the coastal region. Interstate transport should be re-routed to other transport corridors.

5/ Heavy transport should be limited to using the left hand lane through the Bangalow to Ewingsdale section. This would mean heavy transports could not use the overtaking lane. All heavy traffic would keep to left lane and follow traffic in the left lane. Obviously in cases where the left lane was blocked the heavy transport could overtake using the right lane.

After no response on the first letter and a number of phone calls to the Ministers office I wrote another letter. The main points of letter 4 May 2005 to Minister for Roads were:

- accidents were continuing to occur on the Bangalow to St Helena Section of the Pacific Highway. I had narrowly missed being involved in an accident with a B Double on that day and in the weeks previously when driving my children to the school bus stop. There was another accident on St Helena corner on the day of my letter, where a child was killed in a two car collision, after a truck earlier in the morning had knocked down the safety fence;
- The Fowlers lane intersection has the added danger of being on a curving section of the Pacific Highway. The tight turning radius of the curve at this intersection means the speed limit should be much less than 100 km/h which is the posted speed

The Ministerial response, 5 May 2005, to my letters to date was, "The matters you have raised are currently being examined and a response will be provided to you as soon as possible." There has been some very minor works of additional bitumen at Fowlers Lane and Coolomon Scenic drive intersections since I wrote these letters.

There have been a number of serious accidents along the Bangalow to St Helena section since opening of the Brunswick to Ewingsdale. Details of some of these are:

- a man was killed undertaking a U turn in a car on the St Helena corner soon after opening the Brunswick to Ewingsdale section. I understand that the driver crossed the double white line and was hit by a northbound truck. I understand that the driver had first been trying to drive north and was confused by the apparently north bound lane on the round-a-bout on the Byron Bay interchange; The posted speed on the St Helena corner was then 100 km/h;
- a fatal accident where a local woman was driving and the passenger was killed on the St Helena corner in 2003. The driver of the car, _____ has stated to me that she was travelling up the hill on the St Helena in the rain at 80 km/h and slid across the road into an oncoming northbound car. At the time the posted speed on this corner was 100 km/h.

was convicted for negligent driving. A tow truck driver was present on the scene removing another vehicle from an earlier accident involving a southbound car crashing with a northbound truck carrying a skip observed the accident. This witness did not give evidence. The previous accident had caused diesel and oil to be spilt on the road surface. I believe there was a total three accidents on that corner during a period of a day.

I believe the principle cause of the accident and the chain of event leading to the accident was the posted speed on the corner was much too fast. conviction for negligent driving should be overturned. The responsibility for the series of accidents should rest with the RTA who designed the road and posted the speed on this corner.

After this accident the speed on St Helena was posted to 80 km/h;

- The fatal accident on 4 May 2005 involving the infant on St Helena corner and appears to have caused the RTA to post a speed of 60 km/h for the St Helena corner. It is notable that a northbound truck had flattened the guardrail and turned on its side on the morning before the accident. The RTA media statement about the crash did not mention the truck accident removing the safety fence;

- Since the erection of the guard fence it became clear to local residents of how many accident occurred on the St Helena corner. Every time it rained and sometimes when it hadn't rained you would find yourself either assisting other motorists who had crashed into the guard fence or else noting more damage to the fence from another accident. During this ongoing process of fixing the fence every few weeks the RTA did not reduce the posted speed on the corner.

- a fatal accident involving a car and motorcycle at the Coolomon Scenic Drive corner on 4 February 2005. This corner on a horizontal curve has posted speed of 100 km/h with very limited visibility and a considerable volume of turning traffic;

I was witness to another serious accident in 2004 after a semi-trailer crashed into two cars turning from the central turning lane into Coolomon Scenic Drive from the Pacific Highway. In that accident no one was killed.

Drivers travelling south experience freeway conditions along the Brunswick to Ewingsdale section of the Pacific Highway right into a very dangerous corner at St Helena. As state above accidents have occurred every time it rains on the St Helena corner before the speed was posted to 60 km/h.

The RTA has been long aware of this dangerous corner. The September 1999 Bangalow to St Helena EIS suggests that the corner has a design speed of only 60 km/h. The designers of the Brunswick to Byron section did not recommend a reduction in speed for this corner. Generally the RTA has been very reluctant to reduce speed limits or control heavy vehicle speeds.

The correspondence of my neighbour Keith Bower 5 January 2004 clearly details these dangers in his submission to Professor Soames Jobe Pacific Highway Safety Audit is appendix 3. Clearly more needed to be done and RTA appears to need more than one serious

accident at each spot before action is taken.

The RTA has not been bought to task for this and the many other accident and fatalities which have occurred on the St Helena corner. The history of accidents on the St Helena corner demonstrates that the RTA policy and administrative responses on Pacific Highway do not have a capacity to safeguard the driving public.

Wider impacts of current use of the Pacific Highway

It is clear that the opening of the Chinderah to Yelgan section of the Pacific Highway & the flawed decision to gazette B Doubles (detailed later in this report), in August 2002, has directed the majority of heavy freight transports from the New England Highway to the Pacific Highway.

The increase in heavy freight transport and B Doubles has had major implications for other road users and the communities along the Pacific Highway. These problems are particularly notable on non-upgraded sections of highway, as outlined above, because of aggressive behaviour & consistent speeding of a large percentage of heavy transports.

Communities along the NSW north to across the Queensland border have been impacted. As suggested above, the sections of older road (non upgraded sections) do not have the design capacity to safely accommodate the increased load of both passenger & heavy traffic.

Local traffic must mix with B Double and heavy traffic at Macksville, Urunga, Nambucca, Coffs Harbour, Woolgoolga, Grafton, Tweed & Coolangatta/Tugan and Ballina & through Byron Shire on non-upgraded sections of highway. The incompatibility of heavy transport with local passenger & tourist traffic is apparent to everyone. Local people are obliged to use the Pacific Highway and are generally sick of having to deal with so many trucks. There is little margin for error in your interaction with a 65 tonne road vehicle.

What the community on the north coast genuinely seeks is a strategy for getting the bulk of heavy freight & interstate freight off the Pacific Highway.

The concept of slowing moving through upgrades along the Pacific Highway for the next 10 years while allowing heavy interstate transport to mix with local traffic is not acceptable to the community. Government needs to move quickly to change this situation. While the increasing volumes of heavy transport continue to share the road with local traffic on non-upgraded section serious accident will occur. New divided road cannot be built overnight. The heavy traffic can be directed back to the New England Highway virtually at the stock of a pen. Urgent government action will save lives and community anguish.

What upgrade of the Pacific Highway is sought by the community

I have prepared a submission titled '**Design Criteria of Pacific Highway as a Tourism & Coastal Link Corridor**' for the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale CLG on 28 February 2005. With this document I sought to set up a plan for use of the Pacific Highway, which would be acceptable to the community.

The criteria set out in this tourism & coastal Link route option were:

- the Pacific Highway be designed along the existing route;
- the highway use concept be as a road to service communities along the highway from Hunter river to Queensland border for regional business & tourism.
- the highway will service projected community growth, tourism and regional development over the next 20 years;
- highway usually be a four lane carriageway, at specific locations such where constrictions exist road would be less than four lanes;
- incorporate mechanisms for safe highway access from local roads;
- establish highway use patterns that reduce noise & particularly night time noise;
- the highway retain scenic attributes;
- the specifications of the road be for light vehicle traffic up to 100 km/h, except where constrictions curves and intersections cause need for speed reduction;
- plan for rerouting heavy transport from the Pacific Highway, to other designated freight routes - rail & New England Highway;
- restrict use of highway all classes of vehicles up to semi trailers. B Doubles would not be gazetted on the Pacific Highway;
- establish a mechanism for separating heavy transport from other traffic on the Pacific Highway. Heavy transport would remain at controlled speeds through the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar Highway section. Speed limits of up to 80 km/h for heavy transport with these vehicles remaining in left lane over the entirety of the highway section;
- develop a transport strategy to service the local communities, which incorporates rail & public transport, and reduces need for vehicular and freight traffic use of the Pacific Highway.

The members of the CLG unanimously supported this proposal, together with a related proposal concerning strategic planning, on 30 May 2005. The minutes of this section of the CLG meeting are attached in appendix B. The RTA staff at the meeting indicated that the CLG was not the correct forum to discuss these issues, but said they would pass the message onto their superiors. ←

This proposal accepts that heavy transport must use the Pacific Highway to service the communities along the Highway. It does however allow for setting heavy vehicle speeds to 80 km/h and control of driver behavior on non-upgraded section of the Pacific Highway. Starting from the premise that the Pacific Highway is not the interstate freight corridor will change the kind of design which necessary to upgrade the Pacific Highway. It also provides an opportunity for the Highway to stay within its existing route and drastically reduce the cost of the upgrade.

The proposal also recognises that interstate travellers and Sydney to Brisbane passenger traffic show a preference to use the coast road over inland routes and the road should be designed for this traffic.

I have consulted with a number of community members, community organisations and elected representatives of communities north & south along the length of the Pacific Highway before submitting my proposal to the CLG.

The sense of the local community is that the Pacific Highway should be planned as a tourism highway, which incorporates slow sections and interesting locations. Small & large towns could remain in the Highway, so that tourist related business in those towns continue to derive economic benefit from Highway users.

I suggest that the kind of road being proposed by the RTA based on the design specifications so far presented to the CLG will not server the local communities interests. I further detail this matter later in the report.

The way the CLG is currently cast, does not give the community opportunity for developing transport options affecting the Pacific Highway. The Roads Minister needs to recognize this and provide a suitable process to develop a community based transport strategy. The Minister needs to get a proposal, which is acceptable to the community before defining a new Highway route.

Ad Hoc planning at the RTA must transform into a community based planning framework

I believe the current phase of Highway and freight infrastructure planning is ad hoc and needs to reassessed within a planning framework that involves by the community. I detail fuller detail of RTA lack of strategy in section i Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task). The current CLG process is limited by the RTA, so that it cannot incorporate some of the wider implications of the roads being planned.

Addressing what the road should be used for has a large bearing on how the highway should be upgraded. It will cost substantially more money to build a fast efficient freight corridor, as heavy vehicles have difficulties with steeper grades, than a road for tourism and servicing local communities. If private or public money is spent on roads designed for trucks it is unlikely to be spent on alternatives, such as upgrading the rail system, which would get freight off the road.

Impacts of Current Project Design: Pacific Highway - St Helena to Tintenbar

The Pacific Highway will have most impact on local communities and economy, if the route departs from the previously approved and publicly notified highway route, particularly approved Ballina bypass and the Bangalow to St Helena upgrade. Alterations to approved routes severely affect the local community because of the reliance has been placed in planning and developing business based on previously announced and approved route plans.

The RTA project objectives as they currently stand plan for development of a 4 and 6 lane route, with deep cutting with service roads, through the hilly terrain of the study area.

That all other new upgrade sections of the Pacific Highway are 4 lanes. The RTA plan to make this section six lanes demonstrates that this section will be very different from other sections. The 110 km/h design speed through vertical and horizontal planes is not consistent with any other spending on upgrades to date.

I note the pronouncements of the Federal Transport Minister John Anderson of a concept to develop a Pacific Motorway. I discuss some of this issue in this report in section i (Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task)

Features of the Pacific Highway upgrade & work of CLG

Separation of local & through traffic

The concept of separation of local traffic from highway traffic, so that local users including school buses, do not have to interact with high speed and large mass highway vehicles, is good. The implications of grade separation for local road, as this project stands, is the additional lanes of service road on both sides of the 4 or 6 lanes of Pacific Highway. This will widen the current Pacific Highway footprint.

The use of the Highway for less intensive traffic usage such as tourist traffic and local semitrailer usage, as defined in previous tourism & coastal link corridor section, would reduce the need for separation of local and highway traffic.

Planning for the Pacific Highway in the short terms should achieve separation of north and southbound traffic, but not necessarily to the 4 lane standard.

Limited access conditions, i.e. no private access points along the proposed highway upgrade

Many other sections of recently upgraded highway (last 10 years) do have private access to the highway which demonstrate again the lack of consistent planning by RTA.

In principle I agree that if the highway is constructed as an interstate freight corridor then there should not be private access into a stream of high speed and large mass traffic. The implication is that there will be two lane service roads on either side of the highway makes a very large highway footprint.

I do support the continuance of private property access along the highway, which is developed as a coastal tourism and community link road.

Concept design for a 110 km/h design speed for the vertical alignment and 110 km/h design speed for the horizontal alignment

Most hills and ranges in the escarpment between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar have slopes around 5%, with Tintenbar and St Helena Hills being 9% and 8 % slopes respectively.

The approved Ballina Bypass goes around Tintenbar hill. From my perspective St Helena Hill must remain in the Highway route requiring a posted speed of 60 - 80 km/h over this section. I believe the plan for the St Helena Hill area proposed in the EIS 1999 for Bangalow to St Helena has a 80 km/h design speed.

The implications of gradients for heavy mass vehicles to travelling at speeds approaching 110 km/h are that existing hills have to be levelled to 2 -3 % gradients or tunnelled.

As outlined above, it is not in the interests of the local community is not to have a very fast road traffic travelling through it.

Freight transport vehicle requirements

Current terminology used by RTA of 'Freight Vehicle Requirements' means Pacific Highway will be designed to accommodate B Triple traffic. Shane Higgins of the RTA has confirmed this in questioning at the CLG meetings.

I believe the Pacific Highway should be upgrade to the standard of Semi Trailers only. B Doubles or B Triples are not suited to climbing slopes over 5% on Pacific Highway.

Noise from Pacific Highway

RTA should stipulate what level of noise the project will produce. Of concern is that transport industry has a time frame of 10 or 15 years to meet noise guideline and the freight transport industry is expected to double in next 10 years.

The community is opposed to implications of the Pacific Highway as a freight corridor. Noise is one of these implications hotly opposed.

Related to the issue of the number of trucks and the speed they travel is noise. If the truck number were reduced there would be significantly less noise. If truck speeds were reduced to below 80 km/h then road noise would be also significantly reduced. I understand that tyre, differential and drive train noise begin to make substantial combined noise above 70 km/h. The kinds of engine breaks must also be addressed as some kinds having much greater capacities to generate noise which effects the community.

Bob Higgins RTA on route options for St Helena to Tintenbar

At a meeting, Bob Higgins, the RTA Manager for the Pacific Highway, in December 2003, indicated that the option of a road/tunnel through St Helena Hill and into the Tinderbox valley was being mooted within the RTA. Subsequent involvement in the CLG process has confirmed this route to be the primary route under investigation by the RTA/ARUP Team. From this Tinderbox Creek east all other route options radiate on and off the escarpment.

Bob Higgins at the last CLG (18 July 2005) indicated that if the Highway was not put into Tinderbox Valley then it would be built along the route approved in the Bangalow to St Helena EIS.

c/ Impacts of the Highway on Agricultural land

As a farmer the plentiful rain, mild stable climate and deep friable free draining Basaltic soils are magnificently lend this region to horticultural and intensive agriculture.

The value of agricultural land should not be limited to the land's current agricultural use. For example, cane land within the study area is capable (and is in the process) of being converted to alternative crops, as market values of respective crops change.

Many properties in the region trade on the concept of being clean and green philosophy. My farm, which is an example of this green and clean philosophy, produces high-grade organic turkey meat. I also grow organic stone fruit, organic macadamia nuts & cattle. Having the Pacific Highway moved close to my property in Tinderbox Valley has implications for my business and its image.

The extent of natural vegetation and the functioning ecological processes, on my property, assist our organic & natural farming enterprises. This natural processes form an important part of our integrated pest management program. I believe that having the Pacific Highway closer to my property will impact on these ecological processes and impact on our business viable.

When I bought my property there appeared to be certainty that the Pacific Highway would be built along the route approved in the September 1999 Bangalow to St Helena EIS. What RTA has now done is set aside this approval. This decision will adversely impact our ability to grow & market our produce and will adversely affect the value of our property.

Were the Highway to go into Tinderbox Creek our property would be more affected by increased noise, be closer to the Highway and be effected by particle and gaseous pollution from the Highway. The Highway will also become visible from our property. I have made significant investment in my farming enterprise and home believing that the Pacific Highway would stay where it is.

Were the Highway to be rerouted the issues of impacts of groundwater aquifers impact & water tables and sub surface flows would be a major concern. Our property is dependant on underground water for agriculture.

Our neighbour, Gary Jarret, whose property is on the proposed Highway route, is important to our business. Currently we buy our cattle through Gary. We rely on his business to herd and send fattened cattle to market.

Impact of new Highway route on ecological processes

A new Highway route through Tinderbox valley would have major impacts on wildlife dispersal in the local area. The 4.0 ha of remnant rainforest patches on our property and the adjoining properties will become an 'island' surrounded by highways. This has major implications for the dispersal and long-term conservation status of the species living in these patches.

These rainforest patches, except one, are currently quite distant from the current Highway and not directly in the same drainage geography, as the Highway. Moving the Highway to Tinderbox Valley would bring the Highway into the ecological processes of these remnants.

Our patches are a very significant portion of the big scrub rainforest vegetation, riparian vegetation and vertebrate and invertebrate animals populations. There are a number of endangered species in these remnants.

The significance of our remnants can be understood if one considers that the Big Scrub sub tropical rainforest which once comprised 34,000 ha in this area and was the biggest area of rainforest in Australia. This forest has been cleared to such an extent that only 1.0% remains. The rainforest area on our and surrounding properties are significant as very little eastern plateau type forest remains. These patches are of considerable conservation significance. For the pademelon species living in this scrub there will be little safe option for reconnection with the apparently contiguous population to the east.

It is notable that platypus live in the streams in the study area, some of which are not in a very pristine state, particularly in parts of the Tinderbox Creek system. Platypus, have been observed in the stream leading from the south of St Helena Road turnoff. This area would see major impacts by proposed route and derive pollution from surface runoff from any new road. There would be devastating impacts on this platypus population.

Another potentially sensitive species, the Tusk frog *Adelotus brevis*, has been sighted in the Tinderbox area in riparian vegetation dominated by exotic weeds. Given the highly impacted nature of this ex-big scrub area the riparian areas forms a very important conservation zone and need to be included in the measure of project impacts. I have observed the remains of a Barred Frog, *Mixophyes* sp also in this locality, which is a notable species similarly sensitive to road impacts.

It is likely that the old highway route is also impacting wildlife dispersal. Building vegetated underpasses at the main dispersal points at the heads of streams would significantly improve this situation.

Keeping the road on its existing route will minimise impacts to wildlife and natural vegetation. One area, which requires special attention, is a remnant patch of hilltop forest,

which lies on the boundary of the existing Highway between St Helena turnoff and Coolomon Scenic Drive. This patch is at risk on the existing Highway route.

Fog, Inversion of air and pollution in Tinderbox Valley

The coastal plain and some valleys including Tinderbox Valley are prone to fog. These fog areas pose potential for increased accidents and concentrating pollution in an inversion layer. My experience in the St Helena, Tinderbox & Talofa Valley areas is that the hilly geography on the escarpment traps fog and moist air. This fog is slow to dissipate under an atmospheric inversion layer.

During autumn, winter & spring nights this valley system fills with fog. The fog off the Alstonville plateau, drains east through this valley on the land breeze. On quite still mornings very thick fog will remain in the valley. RTA should not ignore the implications of this fog and inversion layer just because of difficulties in obtaining data.

On still nights and mornings fog is trapped in what appears to be a temperature inversion in the Tinderbox Valley. Sometimes this layer appears to begin right outside my front step and the cloud of fog extends as a flat cloud mass right across the valley to Telofa and the base of St Helena tower.

There seems a likelihood that if the Highway were to pass into the Tinderbox valley then pollution from the Highway could concentrate in this air inversion. Vehicles gaseous emissions, which remain in the air inversion could then concentrate and drop out on sites at some elevation or distance from the road. Nasty pollution effects, particularly described from power stations, causing vegetation burn off have been described elsewhere. In these cases pollution can be concentrated and then brought to ground level some distance from its source.

The existing Highway, except through the valley east of Bangalow remains up on top of the escarpment where the fog and air inversion do not appear to occur.

The other related pollution issue is the proximity to dwelling houses, streams and areas of natural habitat especially when vehicles are travelling up hills. Vehicle particularly trucks travelling up hills burn more fuel travel slower and emit more exhaust.

People currently beside the highway are being directly affected by pollution resulting from the RTA decisions to allow increased heavy freight transport.

d) The potential impact of the upgraded highway on prime agricultural land in the expanded study area;

The only comment I can make on this issue is my general knowledge of farming and the presentation of Col Dory concerning impacts of the project in the Newrybar Swamp. The most significant issues I note in this area are:

- impacts of building a road on peat soil which have poor building foundation capacities;
- potential of new earthworks to upset soil structure & cause acid runoff impacting agricultural and ecological process;

- disruption of farming operations by cutting through existing farms;
- a new Highway route disrupting subsurface drainage and water flows in Newrybar Swamp;
- road positioning causing erosion around bridges on a new Highway and the potential of natural flooding of the Highway in Newrybar swamp;
- trapping and concentration of exhaust fumes in air inversion and fog in the Newrybar swamp;
- proximity of the proposed highway to areas of high conservation value in Broken Head and Newrybar swamp;
- disruption of ecological processes in Newrybar Swamp and impact on farm integrated pest management.

f) The impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing of interstate and local transport;

There is consistent sense amongst the community that heavy vehicle numbers have significantly. General consensus amongst local residents, along the Highway, is that there has been a large increase in heavy vehicles since August 2002.

The Minister for Roads indicated in answer to a parliamentary question (9 May 2005) that, "Following the opening of the Pacific Highway to B-Double use there was a relatively small drop in the number of B-Doubles on the New England Highway and an increase on the Pacific Highway." RTA staff have played down the switch of trucks to the Pacific Highway from the New England Highway when questioned on this issue.

The anecdotal evidence from people traveling on the New England Highway suggest that little heavy transport now using the New England Highway.

Comparing the data presented in the 1999 Bangalow to St Helena EIS to the information supplied by RTA, there appears to have been a 25 – 35 % increase in heavy vehicles in the past 7 years. This does not equate with the impression of local residents, particularly since the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah section.

Can I suggest that the Parliamentary Inquiry request comparative traffic data from the RTA on New England and Pacific Highways since 1998 to compare the changes in use of these Highways.

In meetings so far with ARUP & RTA, the RTA representative Shane Higgins has indicated that the issues of use of the Pacific Highway by B Doubles & heavy transport and the possibility of rerouted heavy transport back to the New England Highway are not issues of discussion for the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale CLG.

To diverge to another related issue. The current strategy of the RTA to address the overloading of freight vehicles vehicle also appears ineffective. A local resident earlier this year told me that when RTA sets up a truck weighing station outside Ballina many trucks are seen bypassing this site by travelling though Tevan, Alstonville and Wardell.

e) The impacts of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway;

Gazettal of B Double through Byron Shire was not proper administrative process.

As stated above, since the gazettal of the northern section of the Pacific Highway for B Doubles and the opening of the Chinderah to Yegun, there has been an increase in the use of the Pacific by heavy transport. Nearly all Brisbane to Sydney heavy freight apparently now uses the Pacific Highway. It has been suggested by RTA personnel that additional traffic from the Newell Highway has been now redirected to the Pacific Highway.

The process of approval of B Doubles through Byron Shire effectively side-stepped the Byron Shire Council. The Byron Shire council had a legitimate role in the administrative and assessment process as defined in the Route Assessment Guidelines for Restricted Access Vehicles.

B-doubles come under the category of restricted access vehicles, which can only travel on highways or local roads with special permission. B-doubles rarely used the North Pacific Highway as a freight transport route prior to this gazettal. They were not allowed north of Ballina.

I bring your attention to the letter of the Byron Shire Council Wagne Collins, Acting General Manager of 19 December 2002 to the RTA (BSC File No. ENG 658700/#364274) to Peter Collins, RTA. This document is attached as Appendix 5. This document provides detail of how the RTA did not follow correct administrative procedure in the gazettal of B Doubles on the Pacific Highway.

This letter & my personal communication with the Mayor Jan Barham, indicates that the Council has had a consistent position of opposition to B Doubles traveling through the Byron Shire.

The Ministry of Roads and the RTA did not adhere to the procedural process as outlined in the Route Assessment Guidelines for Restricted Access Vehicles when approving the gazettal of B Double through Byron Shire on August 5 2002.

The RTA process appears to have failed to follow administrative procedures by:

- not formally and properly notifying Byron Shire of the RTA intention begin formal assessment process for B Doubles or notify Council of the statutory time limits for being involved in this process. The RTA did not properly notify Byron Shire that the RTA was intending to gazette outlined in the Route Assessment Guidelines for Restricted Access Vehicles;
- following an incorrect administrative procedure which had the effect of ensuring the views of the Council were not obtained;

- not accurately representing the views of Byron Shire Council in RTA assessment report.

Under these grounds I seek a review of the previous Ministers decision to gazette B Doubles on the Pacific Highway. The current Minister should set aside the previous minister decision and properly undertake the assessment process for these vehicles.

I believe the decision of the Minister to gazette B Doubles is not subject to the 'Statute of Limitations'. This means that the decision remains open to legal challenge.

I also note the letter of the NSW Ombudsman C/2004/1708 and the RTA response CE04/1553, result from RTA failure to consult properly with Byron Shire Council. These documents are attached as Appendix 6.

The RTA response to the Ombudsman letter stated on a number occasions that the RTA would be amending the Route Assessment Guidelines for Restricted Access Vehicles. To my knowledge these guidelines are yet to be amended.

B Doubles are hazardous because of their weight and size. As stated above, for local residents, the main issue is that truck drivers will not always control large mass (65 tonne) heavy transports at current driving speeds on these slopes & curves.

To a considerable extent sections of the road between Ewingsdale and Ballina have gradients of approaching or above 5%. The Route Assessment Guidelines for Restricted Access Vehicles, May 2002, states in the section assessment of road conditions A3.4.1 Overtaking Opportunities - Rural Areas, that, "Overtaking opportunities are to be sufficient so that the percentage of vehicles following another vehicle meets the requirements for that route. The TRARR model can be used to identify the percentage of vehicles following. Particular attention would need to be given to roads with significant proportions of grade exceeding 5%."

Given the > 5% slopes through Byron Shire it is not clear how met these Guidelines without comment in its assessment process. I think it is questionable that this section of Pacific Highway is suitable for B Doubles traveling at the speeds posted. The RTA should provide detailed justification why the road conditions and rate of usage meets safety standards.

The St Helena section of the Pacific Highway has a gradient of 8%. The slope at Tintenbar Hill on the Pacific Highway is 9%. Local people have indicated that B Double have been become stuck on both hills. The B Doubles have been forced to undertake the dangerous maneuver of uncoupling and hauling their load up the hill in two parts. B Doubles stopping on St Helena and Tintenbar hill cause major interference to traffic flow particularly other heavy transports.

There has been less evidence of this kind of situation developing in the past year. It is likely that operators in both instances were overloading trucks and this practice has been stopped.

B Doubles are not suited to drive the Pacific Highway between Tintenbar & St Helena and should be redirect to the New England Highway.

- g) The impacts of interstate truck transport on the New England Highway;
- h) The significance of the New England Highway as a designated national transport route;

New England Highway as designated Interstate Freight Corridor & Auslink White Paper

The New England Highway is the Federally designated interstate freight corridor between Sydney and Brisbane. This is within current Federal framework of AusLink White Paper June 2004 and is consistent with current RTA planning document of 1992 & 1996.

RTA has failed to notify effected communities, predict impacts or undertake any amelioration strategies to assist coastal communities deal with the increase volume heavy transport on the Pacific Highway.

The AusLink White Paper provides details of important considerations, which the RTA is not properly addressing. The most fundamental of these is the lack of separation of the local traffic along the Pacific Highway from the heavy freight traffic redirected from the New England Highway.

For the New England Highway the Australian Government has committed funding to a range of works including: • widening at several locations • interchange improvements at Weakleys Drive • road safety improvements and realignment north of Armidale, near Sunnyside Road • realignments at Devils Pinch and Halcombe Hill. In the next five years it will provide the balance of \$97 million to complete these projects. The Government will also invest \$5 million to commence a bypass of Muswellbrook.

The current pattern of road use initiated after August 4 2002 on the Pacific Highway increases the likelihood of serious accidents involving heavy transports. There would be less chance serious accidents if interstate freight used the New England Highway, as there is much less local traffic on this Highway.

- i) Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task;

As you are aware in 1996, the NSW State and Federal Governments announced a ten-year \$2.2 billion program to upgrade the entire north Pacific Highway from Hexham, north of Newcastle, to Chinderah, south of Tweed Heads, to a dual carriageway system.

This upgrade program was instituted following two bus crashes on the Pacific Highway near Kempsey. Nearly ten years later the upgrade has fallen far short of its objectives with less than half of the highway becoming a dual carriageway.

The program has been in effect a “join the dots” process, with much of the road still not a dual carriageway and the planning for this Highway incomplete. The RTA is currently without a proper long-term strategy considering all safety & transport needs for northern New South Wales and development of an adequate interstate freight corridor along the

Australian east coast. With Australian freight needs expected to double in the next 10 years and fuel prices likely to increase new strategic planning is necessary on the part of the RTA.

The 1996 program has broken down into a series of ad hoc decisions by the RTA and Ministry of Roads, which are not serving the interests of the community.

There has been no strategic planning process by NSW Government or RTA for the approval of B Doubles on the Pacific Highway or the Pacific Highway to become the main freight corridor. Both decisions appear without a strategic planning context.

The detail provided above concerning the gazettal of B Doubles suggest there may have been intent on the part of the RTA to ensure that Byron Shire did not participate in the approval process.

I suggest that all local Councils from north of the Hunter River across the border to Tugan in Queensland should have been consulted as they are affected by the use of the Pacific Highway as the main interstate freight corridor. In each of those communities there are a large number of people who do not support current situation and are affected by noise & road safety.

I am concerned that the RTA is also not addressing the long-term strategy of the National transport needs. I believe that RTA focus is on building roads that should already have been completed and that National transport needs have changed in that time.

The original program for building safe roads appears to have been overtaken by the agenda of making the Pacific Highway available as a fast freight corridor for interstate heavy transports.

RTA will always state that its primary objective is road safety. But clearly the intention of road safety has been lost in trying to serve the needs of the freight industry when the B Doubles were gazetted on the Pacific Highway and the New England freight traffic descended onto the Pacific Highway.

As stated above, the planning of RTA must clearly spell out what is primary purpose of the upgrade process on the Pacific Highway or other projects. The Highway the purpose of the Highway must be planned. The interests of the community along the Pacific Highway must integrated into that planning process

Further investment in Pacific Highway for heavy transport will continue to skew transport infrastructure toward this kind of inefficient & expensive mode of freight transport.

Detailed below are instances demonstrating where the RTA planning processes for the Pacific Highway has broken down.

Bangalow to St Helena section of Pacific Highway

Local examples of ad hoc decision making process date back to decisions in 1999. The Bangalow to St Helena section of Pacific Highway was approved in September 1999 to the EIS level & within the context of the RTA strategy planning documents. The Minister never actioned this approval and the project languished since this date. What it does show is that the RTA was able to approve a project within its strategic plan for the Pacific Highway and then apparently drop the project and the consequently the strategic plan. The implications of this decision for public safety are well described in the earlier section & my letters in the appendix 1, 2 & 3.

As stated before, the dangers of the existing road were plainly outlined in the Bangalow to St Helena EIS 1999 and have been compounded since opening of Brunswick to Ewingsdale and the Yelgin to Chinderah sections of the Pacific Highway.

Current Projects: Pacific Highway as main freight corridor & B Double Design Heavy Freight Capacity in EIS Assessment reports

Since 1996, within our region, the RTA has built or sought approval for Highway sections from the Chinderah to Yegun, Ewingsdale to Tyagerah, Tyagerah to Brunswick South & Yelgin to Brunswick. The EIS and approval process for each of these projects did not suggest that the Pacific Highway would replace the New England Highway as the main interstate freight corridor or that the Pacific Highway traveled by B Doubles. To my knowledge B Doubles were not mentioned in any of these assessment reports.

Building new transport planning strategy in NSW

The current and obviously outdated strategy planning documents for Pacific Highway upgrade were completed in 1992 & 1996.

The development of the Pacific Highway is currently out of step with the planned development of interstate transport corridors outlined in the Auslink white paper (2004).

The Auslink white paper some of the important underpinnings of establishing rational transport strategy.

Planning using AusLink Model

Particular elements of the Auslink white paper, which are important for NSW Government to consider are:

- "corridor strategies" .."for managing the total transport needs of a corridor by the most efficient means available, rather than "a modally based approach." (P 22);&
- "the Auslink framework recognises the importance of pursuing alternatives to construction" (P 21); &
- "poor and uncoordinated decisions can impose high costs on the community, industry and the environment for decades" (P21).

Consistent to what has been outlined my submission the Minister for Roads should undertake Cost Benefit Analysis, as part of the Strategic Planning Process for upgrade of the

Pacific Highway. The AusLink white paper (P 98), suggests that Cost Benefit Analysis “provide an early indication of a projects economic merit compared with other projects or alternative proposals. “

The Minister for Roads should assess the merit of redirecting interstate heavy transport back to the New England Highway as method which facilitates the transition of inter-state road freight to other modes of transport, particularly rail and perhaps sea. Likewise the Minister also needs to plan options for passenger travel between Brisbane and Sydney and into the NSW north coast. The joining the rail track at Murwillumbah to the Gold coast line could provide the incentive to rejuvenate the passenger rail system in coastal Northern NSW.

Auslink white paper also states: Broad support from relevant stakeholders The Australian Government will seek to ensure that the investment it makes in transport infrastructure development in local and regional Australia is supported by a broad range of interests. Projects that are identified through a collaborative approach, and are broadly supported, are more likely to deliver economic benefits. The Government will therefore give preference to funding applications that are supported by relevant stakeholders. Such stakeholders might include local councils, local businesses and industry, regional development organisations, Area Consultative Committees, community groups and other relevant groups in the region. The Government will not specify how communities are consulted or their support obtained.

Although the Auslink white paper June 2004 (pages 95 -96) details the planning rational for developing a “Corridor Strategy” for Federal funding, of the interstate link between Brisbane and Sydney, the Minister for Roads and the RTA has not yet provided any evidence that such a strategy is being developed.

The NSW Minister for Roads needs to undertaken a strategic planning, which consults relevant stakeholders along the Pacific Highway route from Hunter River to Queensland border within the framework and goals consistent with the AusLink white paper.

The Federal & State government commitment on the Pacific Highway appears to be around \$2.0 Billion for the next ten years. I suggest it is unlikely that the current funding would cover even another 50% of the non-upgraded sections.

Since heavy transports do substantially more damage/vehicle (wear and tear) than other kinds of traffic to road surface. Large volumes of heavy transport require higher cost of investment in road building / km and larger expenditure on maintenance. Heavy road transport is highest cost option for freight transport both in fuel, labour and expense of road building.

Rail is an alternative to Road freight

The current pattern of road usage cannot continue in the long term because of the limits to the supply of fossil fuels and the inefficient way this fuel is used by passenger traffic and the road freight system. Rationalisation of road transport will occur due to fuel cost and pressure to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Transport infrastructure in Australia should emphasise public transport such as passenger rail over passenger car & passenger planes & freight transport systems that incorporate upgrading the rail & shipping infrastructure. The future transport systems must incorporate a strategic change to fuel-efficient transportation systems.

Rail transport has potential to be lower cost & a more fuel efficient option for government. I suggest that spending \$1.0 billion on the Brisbane to Sydney rail line might go a long way to achieving the removal of interstate freight to rail. Such expenditure would bring economic development benefits to inland shires such as Kyogle Casino & Grafton.

Currently on the North Coast Rail Link The Australian Rail Track Corporation proposes to invest an estimated \$119 million over the next five years to increase passing opportunities and improve signalling systems on the rail track between Newcastle and Brisbane.

Relative high cost of road freight from rural areas has impact of profitability of rural enterprises. Although high freight cost & additional need for ongoing road construction associated with larger mass road transport has positive effect on GDP and transport companies, these cost imposts do not improve the countries rural commodity price competitiveness. It is better to spend Federal infrastructure on rail than road transport because this infrastructure will bring longer-term economic benefit. Rail can be a cost effective mode of transport.

Australia agriculture is facing major economic impediments from cost of transport over land. My experience as a grain and legume grower has shown to me high freight costs effect profitability. Investment in rail appears to be a very good option for reducing freight costs for agricultural commodities to market and increasing agricultural profitability.

Pacific Motorway not an option

I note that the Hon John Anderson MP made comments in March 2005, about bringing forward the upgrade of the Pacific Highway by having private enterprise to fund a toll road on the Pacific Highway. This has been billed variously as the Pacific Motorway.

For the RTA to commit to six lanes on the basis of this announcement would be premature & would defies the planning process. Mr Anderson's comments are yet to be proven to have substance. The NSW Minister for Roads has not yet made any public pronouncement of a plan to construct a Pacific Motorway.

Mr Anderson's statements are not consistent with what is described in the Federal Transport Ministry's, AusLink white paper. The white paper appears to suggest that private sector involvement would be encouraged in 'selected urban corridors'.

An outcome of establishing a private enterprise Pacific Highway toll-way, as proposed by John Anderson, is that the operators will seek to maximise returns from the road by encouraging traffic onto the road, particularly interstate heavy transport. A private toll-way of this kind may discourage investment in other modes of freight transport, such as rail, through price manipulation and political interference. Private toll-way owners would

conceivably oppose upgrade of the rail system and seek to protect their multi-billion dollar investment in the road infrastructure.

I do not support such a plan for the current planned upgrade of the Pacific Highway when it is clear that this investment will generally encourage increased fossil fuel consumption and entrench the position of inefficient modes of transport, such as long distance & interstate road freight. Adequate investment in rail and public transport will have beneficial effect of reducing fuel consumption and greenhouse emissions.

Conclusion

The heavy transport oriented upgrade, which RTA is planning for Byron & Ballina Shires is a very expensive and does not have community support.

This project as it stands has major cost of construction & implications for local agriculture if it is designed to the specifications outlined above. The cost of continuing the ad hoc process of the RTA upgrade of the Pacific Highway have major implications for spending other spending on transport infrastructure, which make more environmental and economic sense.

The energies of the RTA must be employed to outcomes, which will benefit the local community in human life and good economy.

j) The significance of statements by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road;

As detailed above I support the concept that the Pacific Highway should be a regional road and not be upgraded as the interstate transport corridor

and

2) Ballina and Woodburn, with particular regard to the following issues:

- a) Impact on prime agricultural land;
- b) Impact on flooding in the mid-Richmond area;
- c) Impact on communities at Broadwater and Woodburn; and
- 3) Any other related matters

No specific comment.

From:

To:

Date: 22/08/05 14:47:33

Subject: Re: Amendment to submissionPacific Highway Inquiry - Matthew Jamieson

Amendment to submission

Please note change to sentence page 6 should read

"- a fatal accident where a local women was driving and the passenger was killed on the St Helena corner in 2003. The driver of the car, , has stated to me that she was travelling up the hill on the St Helena in the rain at 60 km/h and slid across the road into an oncoming northbound car. At the time the posted speed on this corner was 100 km/h. "

Since completing my submission has told me she was actually traveling at 60 km/h when the accident occurred, not 80 km/h as I had written in the submission.

Matthew Jamieson

Sunforest

Organic farm on the red soil above Byron Bay