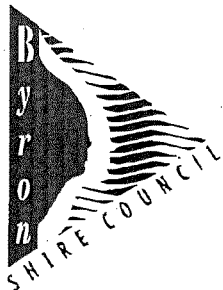


INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation: Byron Shire Council
Name: Ms Pamela Westing
Position: General Manager
Telephone: 6626 7000
Date Received: 26/08/2005

Subject:

Summary



26 August 2005

The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Attention to the Director

By facsimile: 9230 3416

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to this matter, and in particular the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar area.

The Pacific Highway has become a dangerous nightmare for all the locals who have to use it and the many visitors who come to the coast. We now have a deadly mix of interstate freight carriers, locals, visitors and tourists and it simply does not work and is not sustainable.

Our submission is as follows:

1. Ewingsdale & Tintenbar

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

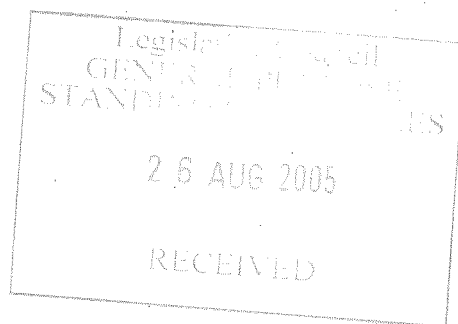
Council believes that the RTA should have more effective forward planning with regard to route selection.

The current process of selecting an initial route and then fracturing communities by later introducing alternatives reflects the poorest of planning.

If the RTA planning perceived that other routes were options originally then these alternatives should have been placed with the original display, with perhaps the RTA highlighting the preferred route and the sound reasoning why other routes were discounted or rejected.

The action of expanding the study route is indicative of lack of planning at the earlier stage. It is understood that the RTA are now seeking a 250m corridor for the upgrade in this area with the former Minister (Costa) announcing that the highway should be three lanes each way, rather than the two lanes each way originally planned.

A 250m swathe through any countryside is overkill, and extremely detrimental, whether the environment, prime agricultural lands or community dislocation are issues.



ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL MANAGER

PO Box 219 Mullumbimby New South Wales 2482
Tel: (02) 6626 7000 DX 20007 Mullumbimby
Fax: (02) 6684 3018 Email: council@byron.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.byron.nsw.gov.au ABN:14 472 131 473

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It is understood that the RTA now has up to twelve (12) routes through the area under consideration.

This poor planning and direction by the RTA has led to considerable stress and trauma for the many people in the expanded area.

Why the RTA would not be aware of alternatives initially is beyond comprehension.

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

Council considers that the road upgrade should be designed for two lanes each way only, as three lanes each way is severely detrimental to the landscape as well as the lifestyle of those adjacent the road.

An integrated plan for transport, not just roads, in Australia as well as NSW should be seen as a priority to determine whether this route or other highway routes should be used for heavy transport.

c) The impact of the highway upgrade on prime agricultural land

Council supports its agricultural economy and supports sustainable agriculture. In 2004 Council adopted a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy which is a first for the region. A fundamental premise of the strategy is that prime agricultural land is a limited resource that is not replaceable. It needs to be protected from uses other than agriculture as well as from fragmentation and being lost from production. The highway upgrade study area passes through some of the Shire's best agricultural land at the eastern edge of the undulating volcanic plateau and coastal ridges. The potential to sever properties that are otherwise viable is a possibility thus impacting on significantly more land than is actually put to use as a road. Maintenance of a viable local industry is fundamental to preserving the flourishing farmers markets industry which enables local products to be sold fresh to local consumers. This has significant long-term effects in reducing greenhouse gas production by avoiding the long distance transport of fresh food.

Agriculture is the third largest source of income for Byron Shire residents with between \$35 million and \$57 million in annual production. Most farmers are relatively small holdings with over 53 % involved in horticulture of some sort.

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

In addition to the above comments, the expanded study area is likely to impact on sugarcane production in the relatively flat coastal plains in the vicinity of Midgen Flat. Although the Shire has a relatively small area subject to cane production these entitlements are family-based commercially viable operations that are relied on by local sugar mills to maintain a threshold for regional production.

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

It is recognised that B-Doubles may have some benefit in terms of their impact on infrastructure. The axle loadings remain the same as single articulated trucks but the added bogey has a net result of lowering the potential increase in total truck numbers using the highway. However, their impact on road safety is the main concern of the local community across Byron Shire.

They currently travel sections of the highway that remain dangerous to those in smaller vehicles having to mix with the heavy vehicles. The two-lane sections of the highway have a poor alignment

both horizontally and vertically with minimum opportunities for overtaking. When B-Doubles are introduced into the mix, the dangers increase due to their size and length.

The crash records along the Pacific Highway involving heavy vehicles show the impact they are having on our local community.

A major concern in the community regarding the planning for the ongoing upgrade of the highway is that the RTA have lost their focus on road safety and the main reason now for the upgrade is to facilitate an ever increasing demand to satisfy the heavy vehicle transport industry. The design criteria for the future upgrades are all about setting grades to suit the momentum of heavy vehicles rather than establishing a route for the safe transport of all users and placing the heavy transport industry back to the New England Highway.

It is apparent in the expansion of the study area that it is to facilitate these design criteria for the heavy vehicles. This means the existing highway corridor and the use of existing approved routes cannot achieve these standards.

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

As progress is being made on the upgrade of the Highway there is an ever increasing number of heavy vehicles using it in preference to the use of the designated national route along the New England Highway.

This impacts on the safety and amenity of the local residents across the region who have to access the Pacific Highway on a daily basis. It is a well documented fact that the mix of local traffic with through traffic is undesirable in road safety, but a system that encourages a mix of heavy through traffic with local traffic can produce a deadly cocktail that this local community does not want.

g) The impacts of interstate truck transport on the New England Highway

There are potential economic benefits in shifting the transport back to the New England Highway. Many small towns feel the pressure with any decrease in their business and this business downturn has a major economic flow on to the community as a whole.

h) The significance of the New England Highway as a designated national transport route

The timeframe for completing the upgrade of the Pacific Highway is conservatively not until 2021. Even a shorter period to 2015 is totally unsatisfactory from a safety, social and environmental impact aspect.

Shorter-term solutions are required to alleviate urgent current problems until, hopefully, a fully integrated transport solution is implemented.

The shift of heavy transport from the New England Highway to the Pacific Highway has been the main source of problems for local communities. This has been exacerbated by the piecemeal planning and execution of the isolated upgrades being undertaken.

The most obvious measure to alleviate the current impacts would be to encourage the bulk of heavy transport movement back to the New England Highway.

If the heavy transport could be reduced on the Pacific Highway in the short term it would reduce community anger and opposition as well as facilitate current works and reduce maintenance.

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

Integrated transport planning is essential. Planning for road upgrades in isolation of other means of general and freight transport is doomed to failure. Moving freight around the state or country can and should involve shipping and rail. These two modes of transport have the ability to move huge quantities of freight and would lessen the burden on the road infrastructure. The Transport Ministry and the Roads Ministry need to work more closely together and in fact may best serve the transport needs of the state and nation if they were under one Ministry.

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

A regional road is a road that is of regional significance and the state government helps fund their maintenance, with local governments carrying out the maintenance. The road in question is NOT a regional road and is fact a state funded highway.

2. Ballina and Woodburn

- a) *Impact on prime agricultural land*

Council is not in a position to comment in relation to the impact in the Ballina and Woodburn area other than to support a concept that prime agricultural land should be protected and that any highway upgrades should be carried out with minimum impact.

3. Any other related matters

Byron Shire is severely impacted upon by this new regime of non-stop truck movements. The Pacific Highway cuts the shire in half, running south to north. Most areas are affected in some way, especially with air polluted by diesel fuel emissions and rubber tyre and road surface particles that can travel many kilometres. The shire is lit up at night with yellow highway intersection lights, and many of the scenic lookouts are spoiled by the ever-present trucks crawling up and down hills. All of this can be a serious impact on the shire's important tourism industry.

Other shires along the route are also severely impacted upon by the introduction of heavy transport to the Pacific Highway. It is time local councils and communities had the opportunity to voice their concerns.

Byron Shire Council has resolved to host a forum to allow discussion of the highway situation as it affects local councils and communities. This will take place late October/early November 2005. The forum was originally planned for 12 August 2005, but was rescheduled to allow for Premier Iemma's new state government ministry to be established. All affected councils will be invited to attend. As well, representatives of government agencies, including federal, New South Wales and Queensland transport departments and agencies such as the NRMA, the Transport Workers' Union, the Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC), etc. Most importantly, any member of the community who wishes to learn more and have a say about the highway will be invited.

Yours sincerely



Pamela Westing
General Manager