

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

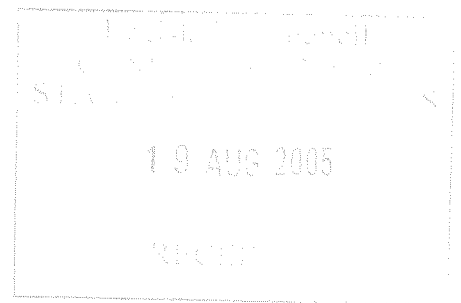
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Subject:

Summary

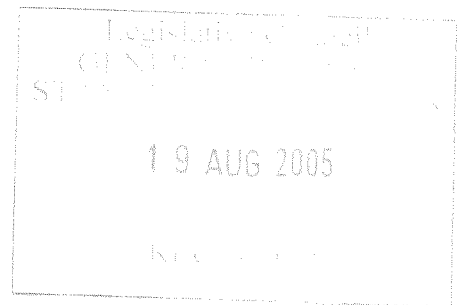


GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 4

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Sarah Jones & Simon Cusack

Dated: 19 August 2004



INTRODUCTION

We submit that the:

- Highway upgrade study area alongside the St Helena to Tintenbar section of the Pacific Highway is unsuitable for use as a highway,
- Proposed upgrades to the highway in the abovementioned section be upgraded to dual carriageway to improve the safety of this high risk stretch of highway,
- Ministerial statements describing the highway as a regional road are significant, and
- Future freight needs for New South Wales cannot be met with these upgrades to a regional road.

UNSUITABILITY OF HIGHWAY UPGRADE STUDY AREA AS A HIGHWAY

The highway upgrade study area on the St Helena to Tintenbar section of the Pacific Highway is completely unsuitable for a highway because:

- Fogs that impede visibility frequently occur in the area, making the route unsafe,
- The lowlands of this area are prone to flooding, which makes road surfaces unstable and liable to sink,
- This area has been identified for protection by the government's own Farmland Protection Project as prime agricultural land requiring protection to support growing local populations and export markets,
- The important character and ecology of this area as a significant tourist attraction would be ruined,
- The lifestyles of the growing local population would be drastically impacted by noise, pollution and degradation of the aforementioned local character and ecology,
- The Pacific Highway is not part of the National Highway System and is in fact described by the government as a 'regional road', and
- The government has already expended considerable funds on the existing route to improve safety of this regional route.

IMPORTANCE OF TO UPGRADES TO DUAL CARRIAGEWAY

The proposed upgrades of the highway to dual carriage between St Helena and Tintenbar must continue as a matter of highest priority to improve safety for regional commuters.

The government has already invested heavily into upgrading sections of the existing highway and should not renege on completing the planned upgrades.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS THAT IDENTIFY HIGHWAY AS A REGIONAL ROAD

Statements made by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road are significant because:

- There is an alternative and purpose built route to areas beyond the local region via the New England Highway, which is part of the National Highway System,
- Expanding the highway along a second route in the proposed expanded area is completely unsuitable for the reasons mentioned above,
- The government seeks to protect this area as prime agricultural land as part of a separate project,
- Expanding the highway along the short distance between St Helena and Tintenbar would not meet the growing transportation needs for NSW, and
- Road transport alone needs to be supplemented by the reintroduction of the railway network that is already in place.

INABILITY OF HIGHWAY TO MEET NSW'S FUTURE FREIGHT TASK

The needs of the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task can only be met by:

- The reintroduction of the railway network and connection to interstate rail systems, the consideration of which the government has committed to reviewing (as published in NSW Government Response to GPSC4 Inquiry into the Closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Service), and
- Ongoing upgrades to the National Highway System.

CONCLUSION

The proposed area for the expansion of the Pacific Highway between St Helena and Tintenbar is completely unsuited to being developed as a highway due to significant physical and environmental reasons. Such a development would also conflict with the government's published objectives of protecting this prime agricultural area. It would also ruin the character of this region, which is an important tourist destination for NSW.

Further, as a regional road, the Pacific Highway cannot adequately meet the rapidly growing needs of the state's transportation needs. These needs can only be met jointly by the purpose built National Highway System and a reintroduced rail system.