

Submission
No 38

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR

Organisation:

Name: Mr & Ms Stephen & Lorraine Cook & Wood

Telephone:

Date Received: 9/11/2005

Subject:

Summary

Stephen Cook & Lorraine Wood

7 November 2005

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 4
Legislative Council
Parliament House, Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Attention: Hon. Jenny Gardiner

Dear Jenny,

Subject: Submission on upgrade of Pacific Highway - Coffs Harbour area

We wish to make the following submission to the State Government inquiry into the Pacific Highway upgrade.

We have lived in the Bonville area for over 25 years. Having moved from Sydney we have made many return trips on the Pacific Highway to visit family and friends in Sydney and on the Gold Coast. During this time we have watched as sections of the highway have been gradually upgraded. Progress has seemed painfully slow at times but the end result has delivered some huge improvements in safety and travel times, notably the Buladelah and Burringbar bypasses.

The same cannot be said for the remainder of the highway which is yet to be upgraded and is grossly deficient in its ability to handle the ever increasing volume, size and mixture of traffic. The Pacific Highway around Coffs Harbour, and in particular the southern approach through Pine Creek and Bonville, rates as one of the most neglected and dangerous sections of the entire highway.

My wife works at Nambucca Heads and has to travel this section of highway 10 times every week - through 6 "bandaid" speed cameras each patrolling about half to one kilometre of highway. When you critically look at the locations of these cameras in relation to genuine "black spots" they are a joke.

My profession has required me to travel frequently on the highway between Sydney and Brisbane. In my current position I travel the highway almost every day, clocking up around 40,000 km per annum with frequent trips within the area Tweed Heads to Port Macquarie

Some of the experiences and we have encountered in relation to the Pine Creek/Bonville section of highway are:

- Ongoing stress due to safety concerns for ourselves and family members

- Frustration at being caught in lines of traffic behind slow moving vehicles and trucks, and the added stress caused in having to then overtake them
- Stress at having to travel along with large semi trailers and in particular B-doubles
- Holdups of up to 5 hours due to bad accidents on several occasions just this year - I think we've counted 12 in the last few years alone.
- Having to take alternate routes through places like Bowraville and Bellingen along secondary gravel roads to get home
- Having to take quick evasive action to avoid a head-on collision with aquaplaning vehicles on 2 occasions
- Having to take quick evasive action to avoid a head-on collision with an oncoming car whose driver had fallen asleep and thankfully ran off the road into a gully without injury
- Seeing our neighbour's 2 children killed by a truck at the intersection of the highway and North Bonville road
- Seeing the devastation of the recent head-on collision between a bus and Tarago van at the same intersection recently where 4 people were killed

The above is just a sample of our experiences. These things have been going on for many years and the solution was blatantly obvious 20 years ago.....separate traffic travelling in opposite directions. In 1998, the local Bonville community were invited to a display by the RTA at the Bonville Hall to view plans of the new Bonville bypass. The route had been set aside over 30 years earlier and it all looked good. We were told that the Bonville Bypass would be completed by 2003.....it is now 2005 and not a sod of soil has been turned.

The inaction, negligence, political buck-passing, cost overruns and general contempt held by successive governments towards the people of NSW and Bonville on this issue are an absolute disgrace. Successive government premiers and roads ministers should be held personally accountable and liable for the 14 deaths that have occurred on this section of highway since the bypass was scheduled to be completed.

More than 20 years ago as part of my job I interviewed then Treasurer Paul Keating live on a local radio station about upcoming election issues. At the time there was a public acknowledgment that the Pacific Highway was inadequate and urgently needed to be upgraded to dual carriageway for its entire length between Sydney and Brisbane. Both local National and Labour candidates adopted this same stance on the issue. I put the question of this bi-partisan approach to Paul Keating, and his response was that whilst it was a commendable ideal, he doubted that it would be very effective.....how right he was. (copy of interview tape available if required)

Yours faithfully


 per L.K. Wood

Steve Cook & Lorraine Wood

cc. Andrew Fraser MP, Member for Coffs Harbour