

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

Name: Mr Cliff James

Telephone:

Date Received: 17/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

FAX TO: 02 9230 3416

ATTENTION: Steven Reynolds

FROM.....Cliff James.....phone...

DATE...17th August 2005

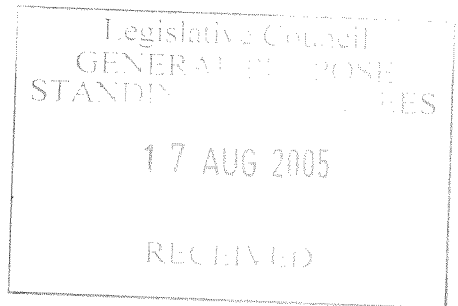
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MESSAGE:

The Honourable Jenny Gardiner MLC
Comments regarding the Pacific Highway upgrade for your consideration.

Regards

Cliff James.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cliff James', written in a cursive style.

To the honourable Jenny Gardiner MLC.
Chairperson General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4

Dear Madam,

As a member of the agricultural focus group established by the RTA to advise the RTA on areas of agricultural concerns with the construction of an upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Tintenbar to Ewingsdale I would offer my comment for your committee's consideration.

Firstly I would like the committee to be aware that my family have a medium sized macadamia orchard adjacent to the existing highway and as such have a personal interest in this debate. Secondly I would like it known that I am a horticultural consultant with both national and international credibility.

Principles.

The basic political principle is to ensure that the road wherever constructed will have the least impact both socially and financially on the community.

The existing highway footprint.

The RTA have indicated that the existing footprint is unacceptable because the land required for the new highway is 200 metres wide and the land directly to the east of the existing highway is unstable. To construct a large main road arm over an existing road would cause enormous disruption to the free movement of traffic. The current road is two lanes wide whereas the new highway will require up to ten lanes i.e. six for through traffic and two each side for domestic travel.

Financial impact.

Using my own farm as an example it was established in 1981 and planted out to 11,000 macadamia trees. There are numerous farms along the existing highway with an estimate of 80 – 90,000 trees directly affected by a route west of the existing highway. The impact of a 200 metre wide strip through these farms would destroy their viability.

Social impact.

I understand there are 82 houses or properties along the existing highway and this does not include the residents on the numerous small service roads that flow onto the highway such as Ivy Lane, Old Byron Bay Road and Martins Lane. None of these properties will be able to directly access the new highway under the RTA guidelines.

Pacific Highway reallocation.

The federally funded highway from Sydney to Brisbane was always the New England Highway. The Pacific highway was never designated as the preferred route between these two cities. It was only when the State Government upgraded the Pacific highway that it became referred to as the number one highway.

Opening of the bypass at Murwillumbah allowed an increasing number of large trucks to use the Pacific highway and their use have exacerbated the road problem.

There is no doubt a new multi lane highway needs to be constructed but it should be remembered that the Pacific highway in 1981 was a service road to the tourist areas of the Far North Coast and South East Queensland such as Byron Bay, Ballina, Yamba, Tweed Heads and Surfers Paradise.

Agronomic values.

It is not difficult to compare land potential or value between the coastal plains and the plateau. Firstly the plateau is covered with ferrous soil between two and four metres deep, free draining and very suitable to grow a wide range of crops such as avocado, custard apple, stone fruit, coffee, passionfruit with the largest established crop being macadamia plantations. The coastal plain soil type is restricted to cane and soya beans in the South. Although there are small plantings of macadamias in the North the extensive flood experienced this year in June hampered with the harvesting of the crop. As the potential flood risk period for the far north coast is between April and July there will always be the uncertainty of the ability to harvest a crop in that area.

In discussion at an AFG meeting the DIPNA representative agreed with me that agricultural potential must be of the utmost importance when making the final decision. The value of prime agricultural land is directly related to the potential for income from that land and the value of the agricultural land on the escarpment is approximately three times that of the coastal plain land.

St. Helena to Ewingsdale.

It has been suggested that the existing road from St Helena to Ewingsdale should be part of the new highway. At the last AFG meeting the RTA and ARUP both indicated that this road was not an option due to it being too steep i.e. above 6%. To widen the road to the required specifications would not be viable due to the instability of the surrounding land.

Construction costs.

I am not an engineer so relative costs of construction are unknown to me. My observations both north i.e. the new road around Yelgun and south at Maclean/Yamba area would indicate that building a road around cane fields is possible. The construction of a major highway should be well away from existing infrastructure if for no other reason than the simplicity of vehicle movement during construction.

I hope the above is of value when you submit your report for consideration.

Kind regards,

Cliff James

