

Submission
No 84

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

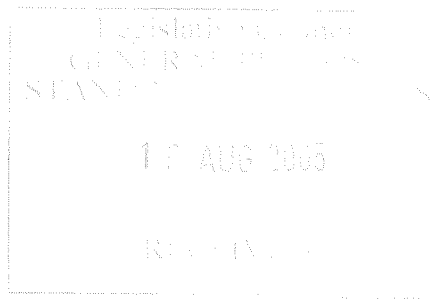
Name: Mr Robert Graham

Telephone:

Date Received: 19/08/2005

Subject:

Summary



18 August 2005

The Director
General Purposes Standing
Committee No. 4
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

By Email: gpscno4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sirs

SUBMISSION FOR WOODBURN TO BALLINA HIGHWAY UPGRADE

My name is Robert Graham, aged 56. I have owned my property since 1998 and chose the spot because of its tranquility and natural features, that is, remnant rainforest and unique biodiversity. The property is some 50 acres and comprises original (untouched) rainforest and cleared land. The property was not expensive in relative terms because of its location on a steep hill site.

The plan I developed for the property was to attempt to return it to somewhere near its original forested condition. I approached the then Department of Conservation and Land Management with my plans and was awarded a grant of some \$40,000 to assist with my restoration plans. In exchange, I signed a Conservation Agreement in perpetuity covering the whole property.

The Department granted me the money because the property is deemed to be an integral part of the biodiversity of the area and is located in a significant animal and bird movement corridor both north/south and east/west. My restoration project will continue and I have dedicated most of my time and resources to it and had planned to do this until I am too old to continue. My children are interested in continuing after I can no longer participate.

The area west of the Richmond River between Broadwater and Coolgardie known as the Wardell Wetland/Heath is the only remaining remnant of Lower Richmond vegetation communities and is the largest natural area of bushland outside designated parks on the

far north coast. It contains some 103 threatened species in the area and a unique diversity of vegetation types not found anywhere else in Australia. There is a population of some 500 koalas in the area (relatively disease free and viable), which is the largest population on the north coast. The koalas are here because of the relative natural and unpolluted condition of the area. Some of the vegetation in this area has never been disturbed by white man (see Blackwall Range Action Group ("BRAG") submission - Flora and Fauna section).

New highway routes 2A, 2B and 2C bisect this unique area. By building any of these routes, animal and plant corridors will be destroyed leading to a decline in the viability of the populations and hence biodiversity. Add to this the pollution emitted by 10,000 plus vehicle movements a day, particularly the emission of dioxins (see BRAG submission section 5). This factor is particularly significant as the Blackwall Range acts as an amphitheatre and hence a barrier to air movement. At night an air inversion layer some 30 to 50 metres high traps air from rising and would allow most pollutants to settle on roofs, vegetation and soil. The greasy substance that settles is water soluble and would wash not only into household tanks but groundwater, polluting both with extremely toxic chemicals that would ultimately have harmful effects on residents, flora and fauna and would eventually travel into the fish and prawn breeding areas of the Richmond River. These effects could not be mitigated.

Route 2D would have somewhat less of an impact on the environment as the terrain is more open and would cut through the edge of vegetated areas.

My home is 4 kilometres west of the current highway and I can hear the traffic quite clearly on any night and often during the day if prevailing winds are in my direction. Again, the Blackwall Range acts as an acoustic barrier and in fact amplifies echoes of noise. Traffic noise from the volume of traffic using the highway would create an intolerable amount of noise.

There are 54 homes along Routes 2A, 2B and 2C that would be adversely affected by air and noise pollution. These homes currently receive little or no air pollution with some being affected by distant noise pollution only.

I believe the RTA has dismissed routes 2A, 2B and 2D for various reasons ranging from too expensive for 2A and 2B (2 bridges would need to be constructed), to an inability to acquire the land for 2D (as the aboriginal owners refuse to sell). This leaves only route 2C as a western option.

From my reading of the literature and studies supplied by the RTA, 231 hectares of prime forested land lies in the path of this route as do many of the 103 threatened species documented in the area. A considerable segment of this route is wetland supporting wetland vegetation. This land would need to be drained by "wick drains" (see BRAG submission section 3.5) or by other methods leading eventually to the death of unique plant communities and hence habitat i.e. the area would be destroyed.

The RTA and Hyder have stated in their Vision Statement and the company Urban Planning Report that they want an interesting green and scenic route. The construction of route 2C will ultimately lead to the destruction of these values not only for the locals but for the motorists they hope to please.

Most locals favour the upgrading of the current highway to a divided road or the construction of 2F. Most respondents to Hyder's survey were against route 2C.

Route 2C is some 1.5 kilometres longer than the existing highway and 1.1 kilometres longer than route 2F. Simple mathematics show that at 10,000 vehicle movements a day this will add an extra 5,745,000 or 4,015,000 kilometres respectively travel per annum by choosing route 2C. It will use approximately 1,000,000 and 600,000 respectively extra litres of fuel and added emissions will be some 2,200 tonnes and 1,500 tonnes respectively of greenhouse pollutants.

The eastern route, 2F, and the existing highway upgraded (which most people favour) by comparison, destroys no vegetation or biodiversity as it is already totally cleared cane land. It is shorter and indeed is favoured by the environmental assessments made by Geolyse. Approximately 9 homes would be affected by route 2F. Air and noise pollution in this open plain setting would be largely mitigated and not affect these homes as on route 2C.

The RTA suggest that route 2F is much more expensive to construct than route 2C but no figures have been forthcoming. This assumption appears to be due to the issue of flooding which of course could be resolved by engineers. On this issue, during the last rain event part of proposed route 2C was some 3 metres under water, a fact supplied to the RTA but not acknowledged by them.

Another reason appears to be objections from the cane industry. As all informed people know the cane industry is nearly dead and receives huge government subsidies regularly. I have been informed by a large local cane grower that "there is no money to be made in cane" and he amongst others would get out if they could. If the death of the cane industry happens the land will probably only be open cow paddocks.

I have read most of the reports released by the RTA and have found much of the data used and reports written to be inadequate at the least, to down right incompetent at the most. They are a joke.

The whole process of selecting a route has been a "rushed job". The RTA theme throughout has been community consultation, again this mantra is a joke and designed purely to deceive the public and politicians. Numerous examples can be used to support this. Secrecy clauses for Community Liaison Group ("CLG") members, CLG members input being almost totally ignored, failure to inform the public of each stage of the process i.e. website not updated, public information phone lines unanswered, commitments made by the RTA's to respond to points of concern ignored, public briefings and information days a waste of time as no response to relevant questions

given, of Hyder continually not answering questions at meetings, lies and misinformation given, totally inaccurate mapping and reports to the public, no documentation available to the public unless by request and then extremely slow to arrive. These are just a few examples.

To summarise, route 2C is the worst option on all grounds, environmental, social and economic and is being pushed by engineers who want easy access to fill for the road and by urban planners who want a green and scenic route (their assessment of a road through can fields is that it is too boring). If route 2C is chosen it will mean the destruction of a priceless environmental asset that contributes to the biodiversity of the world when this road could easily be built on route 2F and destroy nothing. Peak oil (see BRAG submission section 6) will ensure that the road has a limited future. Road transport should be diverted to rail as in the USA.

If a new highway is built west of the Richmond River on routes 2A, 2B, 2C or 2D it will be one of the greatest acts of environmental vandalism and show that politicians and public servants have no soul or appreciation of anything but vested interests. We live in 2005 not 1905.

Yours faithfully

Robert Graham