

**Submission  
No 44**

## **INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR**

**Organisation:** Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network & Woolgoolga Area  
Resident's group

**Name:** Mr Steven Moody

**Telephone:**

**Date Received:** 9/11/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

Please find attached a submission prepared by Steven M Moody, Technical Officer for the Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network and the Woolgoolga Area Resident's Group. This submission of 19 pages includes an Overview, Introduction, Impacts of the Existing Pacific Highway, Specific Examples of Highway Black Spots, Ten Reasons Why Our Communities Reject the RTA's Preferred Options, Alternative Pacific Highway Upgrade Strategy, Comment on the Motorway Pacific & Need for Improved Rail Infrastructure, Community Consultation, The ARUP Peer Review of the Planning Strategy and Value Management Workshop. The attached written submission is supported by a Power Point Presentation that the community respectfully seek to present at the Coffs Harbour Hearings of this Inquiry.



*Interstate trucks and local traffic don't mix*

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**In association with the Woolgoolga Area Resident's Group**

**Prepared by Steven M Moody & Associates,**

**Submission to the NSW  
Parliamentary Inquiry  
into  
Pacific Highway Upgrades  
Coffs Harbour  
November 2005**

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## **1. Overview**

The NSW Roads & Traffic Authority (RTA) preferred Pacific Highway upgrade for the Coffs Harbour area passes through the City from its southern to northern coastal limits, transecting regionally important hilly coastal topography impacting wildlife linkages, agriculture, human culture, scenic value, tourism and quality of life for all those who are attracted to this area to settle.

The RTA's 2003 strategic cost estimate for the 53 kilometer upgrade from Englands Road south of Coffs Harbour CBD to Arrawarra is \$700M to \$900M. Additionally, the indirect economic cost to the Coffs Harbour LGA has been independently assessed at \$2.4B.

The community that the Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network (BAN) represent submit an alternative more cost effective solution involving extending the existing dual carriageway north of Coffs Harbour CBD from Sapphire to Woolgoolga south using at grade protected intersections at an RTA strategic cost estimate of \$145M. This will provide kilometers of additional dual carriageway along a stretch responsible for 11 deaths from 2001 to May 2005. None of the so called 'bypasses S1 and N1 for Coffs CBD and option E of Woolgoolga will return these immediate benefits. However, we strongly object to a major upgrade of this section of highway as it will prolong the use of the coastal route option for 'non local traffic', continue to attract heavy vehicles and involve a major land-take for service roads and grade separated intersections consuming dwindling coastal habitat. The highway deviation known as option E through Woolgoolga west is also totally unacceptable as it transects agriculture important to the area, the Sikh community, urban development and threatens dwindling wildlife habitat.

It is apparent that the 1993 RTA North Coast Road Strategy is outdated and no longer meets the challenges of meeting road transport and community needs consistent with Ecologically Sustainable Development. Further, that whilst community consultation is essential, experience has shown over the past 4 years that contrary to the government's aims it has failed to streamline the resolution of planning issues and bring about a community satisfied with the outcome.

## **2. Introduction**

Whilst not a civil engineer specialising in highway design, I do operate a consulting business in Australia and overseas covering a wide range of engineering disciplines and specialise in auditing and establishing international standard quality assurance management systems and regulatory compliance. As with most engineers with over 25 years of post graduate experience, I have technical interpretation skills, project management and consulting expertise. My wife and I have lived and operated businesses in the Coffs Harbour area on and off since 1980 and currently operate a holiday retreat for tourist in the area.

Since 2001, I have been a member of the RTA Community Focus Group for the Northern Section of the Coffs Harbour Highway Upgrade Strategy representing at various times during that period the Woolgoolga Area Resident's Group and the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism. Currently I assist the Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network (BAN) formed in May 2005 comprising 10 community groups on Coffs Harbour's Northern Beaches.

Coffs Harbour City Council describe its Northern beaches, the focus of this submission, as being made up of the Town of Woolgoolga and 9 coastal villages from Coffs Harbour CBD to Red Rock in the North. Each community has a unique character offering a broad range of high quality lifestyles, including beach side villages, rural residential estates and small farms, a major attraction to the area.

A vibrant economy exists, based on tropical agriculture, tourism and outdoor recreational activities. Strong links exist between the diverse resident cultures, including a prominent Sikh community in Woolgoolga and between rural and urban businesses with both aboriginal and non-aboriginal heritage.

Rural residential and small farm development in the area is controlled to protect and enhance native vegetation and the scenic landscape. All riparian areas are vegetated with local species, many of which being of regionally significance. The water quality of creeks, lakes, estuaries and the adjacent Solitary Islands Marine Park are near pristine being a major asset to the area.

### **3. Impacts of the Existing Pacific Highway**

**Pacific Highway upgrades will impact our coastline, natural environment, agriculture, human culture and tourist. We are losing our lifestyle, sleep and our lives..... Why?**

#### **3.1 1993 North Coast Road Strategy**

In 1993 the NSW Government adopted the North Coast Road Strategy option of **'Selected** Upgrading of the existing Pacific Highway' instead of adopting the **'Motorway Pacific'** option'.

"The Motorway Pacific option (Not Adopted in 1993 North Coast Road Strategy) would have seen 600 kilometers of new freeway standard highway built generally along a new alignment away from the present highway".

"It would have offered the most beneficial impacts to travel time and safety but thought to result in significant adverse impacts on many towns along the route which the Motorway Pacific would have bypassed" (RTA North Coast Road Strategy 1993).

In stead, in 1993 NSW Government adopted the Upgrade option that involved – **"Upgrading sections of the existing highway prone to accidents including where justified local bypasses of Urban Centers". (RTA 1993).**

Experience has shown however that whilst the 1993 RTA North Coast Road Strategy at the time appeared to be a cost effective means of providing for the needs of both local and through traffic and enabled staged construction in areas of greatest need, it is no longer appropriate. The 1993 RTA North Coast Road Strategy is outdated and no longer meets the challenges of meeting road transport and community needs consistent with Ecologically Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the changing road conditions from new straight fast sections to old narrow winding sections are themselves creating traffic collision situations and major upgrades have no place in areas where the 'village atmosphere' is a major attractor to tourist and residents alike.

**So what has been achieved in the 10 years 1993 to 2003– according to the NRMA Report of 6 May 2005:**

- Only 33% is divided carriageway (430 kilometers to go).
- 44% has only two lanes.
- Only 45% is safe for overtaking.
- Although 79% has speed limit of 100 kph +
- As many as 77 speed changes (excluding road works).
- 10,000 motor vehicle accidents – ( Between Macksville & Halfway Creek 50 deaths in 5 years)

### **3.2 Sapphire to Woolgoolga**

There are 31 intersections on the Pacific Highway in Coffs Harbour between Sapphire and Woolgoolga.

Most are hazardous (examples follow in Section 4), but linking them with numerous service roads will cause a large land take and COMMUNITY SEVERANCE, THIS IS NOT THE ANSWER.

#### **3.2.1 Korora – Sapphire on Coffs Northern Beaches**

There is precious little land left remaining in places between the beaches and the hillside. The RTA planned upgrade from 4 to 8 lanes here will desecrate this coastal strip.

According to the RTA report, March 2005 the Vehicle Volume (24 hours) 21,514

Heavy vehicles: 2,055 (10% of day time traffic)

Night time (10pm – 7am) 1,972 total traffic count

Heavy vehicles 586 (30% of night time traffic)

In this area noise measurements undertaken for the report revealed:

- 190 noise sensitive sites
- 38 sites recording 60 dBA +
- 20 sites recording 65 dBA+ = “ACCUTE”

**Studies undertaken in Europe suggest the maximum sound pressure level at night should not exceed 45 dB(A) if sleep is not to be disturbed.**



## **Quality of Life and Healthy Environment.**

Constructing a four lane national highway through our neighbourhoods is not the way to achieve quality of life and healthy environments.

### **3.2.2 Moonee Beach**

#### **The Moonee Action Group:**

- Does not support an upgrade of existing highway.
- Prefers a proper bypass of Coffs and Woolgoolga.
- Requires improved intersection with Pacific Highway before opening of large new shopping complex at the intersection.
- (The current intersection will not cope with increased usage)
- Pedestrian bridge / tunnel across Pacific Highway.
- Need major intersection at Bucca Road not Hoys Road.
- Previous Highway upgrade at Heritage Park interferes with water flow into Moonee Creek Estuary.
- Require highway litter, grease and oil traps to avoid growing pollution of Moonee Creek estuary.
- Highway noise reduction measures needed now.
- Fauna over / underpass required at Skinners Creek & between eco significant South Moonee Forest east of existing highway with State Forest west of highway.
- Trees in existing highway corridor need to be retained.
- Alternative access required for emergency services to all existing and proposed residential development.
- Interim access to highway / new developments during construction need to conform to road design rules.

The Moonee Action Group may make a more detailed submission to this Inquiry

### **3.2.3 Sandy Beach & Hearnese Lake Area**

Concerns of the Sandy Hearnese Action Group include:

- Road traffic noise. The existing and proposed highway upgrade passes through the middle of Sandy Beach residential area.
- Acid sulphate soil disturbance during the highway upgrade
- Dieldrin, arsenic and other pesticide contaminants from banana lands.
- Loss of riparian vegetation from Double Crossing Creek.
- Threat to mangroves from Double Crossing Creek Bridge works.
- Siltation from roadworks in times of heavy rainfall (Highway goes through the coastal floodplains).
- Loss of habitat for large populations of birds which frequent the Lake.
- Additional stress on the Lake eco-system from diesel airborne deposits and oil washed from the road during rain.
- Risk of a major chemical spill (from a road accident) into the Lake which is closed from the ocean for 70% of the year.

The Sandy Hearnese action Group may make a more detailed submission.

### **3.2.4 The Woolgoolga Area and Communities to the North.**

In 1963 the RTA constructed the first deviation around the main streets of Woolgoolga CBD (River, Beach and Clarence Streets). The deviation was constructed approximately 200 meters the west of the original highway. Now the RTA wish to construct a second deviation in Woolgoolga. How many so called by-passes, land take and homes to be destroyed before the RTA Get it right?

The proposed highway deviation known as option E passes through the semi-built up area of Woolgoolga West and clips the Woolgoolga South Urban Investigation Area. The predicted highway 50 dBA 'footprint' covers most of the Woolgoolga residential area west of the existing highway.

Refer also to Section 5: Ten Reasons Why BAN and the Woolgoolga Area Resident's Group Reject the RTA's Preferred Options.

## **4. Specific Examples of Highway Black Spots**

### **4.1 Moonee Beach Intersection with the Pacific Highway**

This is an intersection on a bend that has one lane north and one south with an unprotected turning lane in the middle facing 100kph + highway traffic.

Minor adjustments (widening) of this intersection by the developer will not prevent a major collision occurring here whilst this intersection remains a curved alignment with limited sighting distances and through traffic speeds of 100kph +.

### **4.2 Bucca Road Intersection with the Pacific Highway**

A major intersection for traffic joining the Pacific Highway from the hinterland. This is an area undergoing major growth. Again - an intersection on a bend that has one lane north and one south with an unprotected turning lane in the middle with 100kph + highway traffic approaching from the rear and head on.

Improved road alignment, an additional lane and seagull protected intersection would improve safety. Motorway not needed.

### **4.3 The Pacific Highway Southern Approach to Emerald Beach**

3 people have died here in recent times. Trucks tail gate motorist as the traffic attempt to merge to a single north bound lane. Traffic approach each other at 200 KPH with less than a meter separation.

The need for traffic to continually slow and merge is a proven killer particularly on the crest of hills. Reducing the gradient and adding a lane would eliminate the risk. Motorway not needed just improved road design.

#### **4.4 Pacific Highway Intersection at Emerald beach**

Again an intersection on a bend and a crest with one lane north and one lane south with an unprotected turning lane in the middle with 100kph + highway traffic approaching from the rear and head on.

A reduction of the gradient, improved alignment, additional lane and seagull protected intersection would improve safety. Motorway not needed.

#### **4.5 Pacific Highway Intersection at Sandy Beach**

Again an intersection on a bend and a crest with one lane north and one lane south with an unprotected turning lane in the middle with 100kph + highway traffic approaching from the rear and head on.

A reduction of the gradient, improved alignment, additional lane and seagull protected intersection would improve safety. Motorway not needed

**We don't need a State Highway through our communities to make our local road safer.**

**We need to move the State Traffic & Trucks off our local roads.**

**We need to have 2 lanes in both directions & improved intersection design.**

## **5. Ten Reasons Why BAN Rejects the RTA's Preferred Options**

### **5.1 Agriculture & Human Culture**

An unacceptable 35 agricultural properties will be impacted in Woolgoolga by the construction of option E.

28 of these acutely i.e. become unviable.

Woolgoolga's banana / fruit industry yields over \$20M per annum with a 2.5x flow on to industry & trading.

Agriculture employs 21.5% of the community.

Woolgoolga has Australia's largest Punjabi Sikh community and they own most of the local plantations that for generations have been family run.

**Loss of plantations to the highway upgrade will have a significant devastating impact on Sikh employment, family units and culture.**

### **5.2 Tourism**

Responsible directly or indirectly for 27% of employment in Woolgoolga and contributes at least \$19M to local economy.

**No one wants to holiday near a freeway.**

### **5.3 Business & Commerce**

Mostly dependent on agriculture, tourism and the building trades.

Further urban development and building trades will be impacted by land take of the RTA preferred coastal upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

An independent professional assessment of financial loss to the Coffs Harbour LGA of \$2,400,000,000 excluding agriculture & tourism losses.

## **5.4 Community Severance**

The RTA preferred coastal upgrade passes through most of Coffs Harbour's coastal settlements and will have a major impact on cohesion between the residential communities that will become segmented & more isolated.

The survival of many banana plantations depends upon shared farming infrastructure, resources and services e.g. water source, processing equipment, labour and disease control measures.

The RTA's 2nd proposed highway deviation in Woolgoolga, consisting of 4 to 6 lanes of freeway standard 110KPH highway would be situated only 1600 METERS WEST of the existing Pacific Highway.

## **5.5 Flora and Fauna**

There are a number of old forest remnants, ponds and watercourses vital for the survival of regionally significant flora and fauna that will be impacted by major highway upgrade options.

The Sherwood Nature Reserve in coastal highlands to the west is currently linked to remnant coastal lowland vegetation in the east by wild life corridors essential for maintaining coastal biodiversity.

If our watercourses are impacted during highway construction and use - so will be the Solitary Islands Marine Park and its estuaries.

## **5.6 Human Health & Wellbeing**

There will be an escalation of noise and air pollution as highway traffic escalates through existing and new residential neighbourhoods.

People did not relocate to Coffs Coast to be walled into their homes to shield against highway noise e.g Bruce King Drive Boambee East 100 meters east of the upgraded Pacific Highway south of Coffs Harbour.

## **5.7 Landscape Disturbance**

Highway construction will cause major disturbance to topography affecting agriculture, scenery and the recreational value of the area.

Our hilly topography plays a vital role in the microclimate of tropical fruit cultivation.

Plantation and forest vegetation on slopes plays a vital role in prevention of hillside erosion.

Crop spaying, access to water and other farm units will be impacted by highway cuttings.

Plantation and forest vegetation is critical to local scenic values.

## **5.8 Property Valuation**

There will be a negative impact on a 10 kilometer 500 m wide strip through otherwise future high value properties in the Woolgoolga area

960 potential home sites will be lost in the RTA land take for option E in Woolgoolga.

A major \$900M upgrade of the highway between Sapphire to Arrawarra and deviation option E through Woolgoolga will pass within meters of existing and future homes, originally marketed on “quiet, scenic values”.

During the 4 years of construction the noise and dust from the road works and traffic disruption near private and commercial property will be intolerable

## **5.9 Public Risk**

Diesel pollution of rainwater collected from roofs for homes not on town water. This applies to most homes impacted by Woolgoolga option E.

Pedestrian injury caused by crossing dual carriageways that transect their communities. They will not walk to major overpasses.

HAZMAT accident risk on communities through which the highway passes.

## **5.10 Road Safety**

The merging of slow local traffic (farm / trade vehicles, vista gazing tourist and an aging population) with fast through traffic at the intersections between Arrawarra and Sapphire will increase the risk of high speed collisions.

In the long term the safest strategy is to separate fast through traffic from the slower moving coastal traffic.



## **6 Alternative Pacific Highway Upgrade Strategy**

- 6.1 A moratorium on large scale development along the existing Pacific Highway Sapphire to Arwarra UNTIL THE HIGHWAY AND THE INTERSECTIONS ARE MADE SAFER.
- 6.2 Interim minor upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Sapphire to Bosworth Drive south of Woolgoolga to dual carriageway standard using “at grade intersections” and optimum noise mitigation measures. Cost = under \$200M.
- 6.3 Interim improvements to the existing Pacific Highway through both Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga to improve traffic flow and noise mitigation. At Woolgoolga this would involve reduction of gradients, sound mitigation measures and extension of the 80 kph zone to Mullaway.
- 6.4 Immediate completion of the Hogbin Drive Extension around Coffs Harbour CBD.
- 6.5 Rejection of the RTA coastal route options east of the coastal ridge and commence immediate planning for a proper Pacific Highway bypass of Coffs Harbour, Woolgoolga and the Northern Beaches with a goal of construction to commence within 10 years.

## **7 Motorway Pacific & Improved Rail Infrastructure**

In February 1993 the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Wal Murray released the North Coast Road strategy that included an option to have a toll road from Hexham to the Queensland Boarder. In April of the same year, the Member for Ballina Mr D. L Page asked the Government to consider identifying a corridor that could also accommodate a Very Fast Train infrastructure. Both the Motorway Pacific, the toll-way and calls for improved rail infrastructure has again come before State and Federal Government for consideration.

We commend to Government serious reconsideration of the Motorway Pacific and improved rail infrastructure to accommodate the increasing need for freight transport in this State. The upgrading of the Pacific Highway coastal route is rapidly, if not already reached, its ‘Used By Date’ for inter and intrastate freight haulage at the expense of the communities along its route.

## **8 Community Consultation**

Whilst community consultation is essential, experience has shown over the past 4 years that contrary to the governments aims it has failed to streamline the resolution of planning issues or resulted in a community satisfied with the outcome. Some weaknesses of the Community Focus Group process have been:

- Inaccurate recording of proceedings, particularly during the first three critical years when route selections were being made. This of course can misrepresent the input and views of the CFG members.
- 'Glossy updates' released to the broader community that failed summarise in a fare and equable way the pros and cons of route options. There are numerous examples where very selective use was made of data to promote one option over another in a very unbalanced presentation.
- During CFG Meetings, 'consensus' was based on one CFG member, one view irrespective of whether that CFG member represented a community group or just him or herself.
- Failure to adequately involve Sikh community despite significant impacts to that community and culture. If listed representatives were not able to attend on a regular basis, they should have been replaced.
- At times, especially during the earlier critical stages, notice of meetings were inadequate making it difficult for some members to attend.
- Records of meetings were often received some time after the event making recollection and verification of recorded information difficult.
- The material presented at meetings were often of poor quality e.g. Power Point presentations with cluttered and unreadable information.
- Detailed plans containing symbols hard for lay persons to understand presented with little time for review and comment by CFG Members. In the latter stages this was overcome by requesting copies to 'take home' and review with others in the community for comment but this was generally discouraged on the basis that the information was 'privileged'.
- Overall the CFG Meetings were in a format of briefings permitting questions and answers but with little opportunity for comment and input and reluctance to inform the broader community of the CFG activities.

## **9 The ARUP Peer Review of Planning Strategy**

The community consultation process has had a poor track record prompting a peer review in September 2002 by ARUP. Although touted by Coffs Harbour City Council as an independent review it is noted that ARUP was responsible for the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement on behalf of the RTA for an Upgrade of the Pacific Highway at Karuah. Notwithstanding the questionable impartiality of ARUP with respect to their clients (in part subjects under review), the ARUP report noted a number of short comings in the Coffs Harbour Highway Upgrade Planning Strategy that included:

- 9.1 Limited information provided by the Project Steering Team prevented ARUP to carry out a comprehensive cross check of the sufficiency of information and data in the Project Working Papers.
- 9.2 Only limited information was provided on the 'Peoples Choice" option.
- 9.3 The cost of property acquisition not based on specific property impacts.
- 9.4 Discrepancies existed between the working papers for the cost of adjusting utilities.
- 9.5 No level of service had been defined for the Coffs Harbour deviations.
- 9.6 The far western bypass was not considered in the same level of detail.
- 9.7 Deep cuttings on many of the routes may be difficult to obtain and tunnel alternatives may have to be considered, irrespective of cost.
- 9.8 Implications for peak holiday traffic not adequately addressed.
- 9.9 Discrepancies were noted in night time and through traffic predictions.
- 9.10 Not all the objectives of the Community Involvement Plan were satisfied and major problems remained with stakeholder involvement.

## **10 Value Management Workshops**

In September 2004 the author of this submission sent a formal letter of complaint to the Premier, The Honorable R.J Carr M.P, The Minister for Roads, Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, The Attorney General and Minister for the Environment. The Minister for Rural Affairs, Local Government, Emergency Services and Lands, The Minister for Primary Industries, Minister for Regional Development and Small Business, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, all of whom have portfolios affected by the Coffs Harbour Planning Strategy.

The letter of complaint cited limited community representation at the VMW, the exclusion of upgrade options preferred by both the Coffs Harbour City Council, the discarding and / or ignoring of data prepared by technical experts on behalf of the technical team and adjustment of values after detailed workshop analysis to suit a pre-conceived "popular outcome" of RTA short listed options and the failure of the workshop to apply a genuine 'triple bottom line' assessment promoted as a key methodology of the workshop.

All letters were referred to the Minister for Roads, The Honorable Carl Scully M.P and a reply was received on his behalf by Tony Stewart M.P, The Parliamentary Secretary for Roads. The reply was reviewed by 3 of the 4 community representatives who attended the VMW and being dissatisfied with the response, returned a letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 2004 contending the claims made by the project team concerning the conduct of the workshop. This included the confirmation that of the 25 attendees at the workshop only 4 were representing the 'local community' that actually live or work in the area of the study. There has been no answer received from the Parliamentary Secretary.

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