

**Submission  
No 52**

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

**Organisation:**

**Name:** Mr Richard Casey

**Telephone:**

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

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**Subject:**

**Summary**



## Richard James Casey



The Director  
 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4  
 Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades  
 NSW Legislative Council  
 Parliament House  
 Macquarie Street  
 Sydney NSW 2000

### **Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades**

I wish to thank the Legislative Council for establishing this inquiry so that people, like myself, can put our concerns and considerations out in the public area.

I have tried to be constructive with the points I have made while at the same time putting before the Committee issues and questions which are critical of the methodology of the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA].

I believe my submission covers most of the Committee's Terms of Reference while the major part of my submission concerns the consultative process. I believe many of the negative concerns and frustrations of our diverse north coast community could be overcome by effective consultation between those proposing change and those affected by change.

To this end I have proposed a quite dramatic change to the consultative process in New South Wales.

I believe that if my process is adopted it will reduce conflict, improve the end product and reduce the time taken to move to project commencement and completion.

Richard James Casey  
 RTA Appointed Community Representative  
 Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing Community Liaison Group

Sunday, 6 November 2005

**“CONSULTATION IS A DISHONEST EXERCISE IF THOSE “CONSULTED” HAVE NO REAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSULTOR’S TRUE INTENTION”**

## Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

This Parliamentary Inquiry needs to ask some hard questions of the Road Traffic Authority [RTA].

1. The RTA should be asked to release,
  - a/ the estimated cost at project proposal
  - b/ the estimated cost at budget approval
  - c/ the final cost on completion

for the following completed projects

- Herons Creek
- Eungul Deviation 2<sup>nd</sup> carriageway
- Korora Hill Upgrade
- Bangalow Bypass Duplication
- Ewingsdale Interchange
- Ewingsdale to Tyagarah

These costings are required so that current estimated costings for

- Sapphire to Woolgoolga Upgrade
  - Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing Upgrade
- Can be assessed for likely accuracy.

The RTA should also be asked to release traffic flow profiles, both estimated & actual, for these same projects.

This data is available if one is able to search through a large number of RTA documentation but is the type of information not readily available to the community.

Again the need to get an indication of how real are the RTA's traffic flow profiles.

The RTA should also be asked to provide its reasons for rejecting estimates by community groups that completion of Option E as part of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Upgrade would cost the Coffs Harbour Community \$2.4 Billion.

The RTA should be asked to reveal the costings provided to the Government for the upgrading of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway.

The RTA should also be asked to provide dates for completion of this upgrade if funds were immediately available.

The NRMA's recent report by its Motoring & Services Director clearly shows the failure of the RTA to provide the Community & Parliament with realistic costings and completion dates for the projects it 'manages'.

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The RTA should also be asked to provide cost estimates & completion times for a Motorway Pacific separate from the Pacific Highway. The RTA should not be allowed to use its standard excuse against a Motorway Pacific that separation from the Pacific Highway would disadvantage local communities. This type of claim has been proved to be wrong time & time again in all Australian States. It is a fact that most communities benefit from such separation.

The RTA should be asked to release its methodology used to decide it's preferred option, in particular it should be asked to disclose how it weights the community submissions it receives.

The RTA on page 4 of it's submission to the Ewingsdale and Tintenbar Inquiry stated

*‘that the impact on agricultural land is one of the key values to be considered in developing route options’*

How the RTA reconciles this statement with it's choice of Option E for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Upgrade escapes me.

The RTA should be asked to disclose just what are these key values considered in developing route options. Are they the same for each project? Is the impact of a project on agricultural land one of the key values for all projects? Why isn't it applicable to the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Project? The RTA certainly has not made these values clear to the community.

The following is my view of the shortcomings of the consultative process used by the RTA with a clear statement of the need for effective community consultation, a statement of the Essential Elements of Community Consultation and, finally a view of how effective consultation can be achieved.

I hope that the Committee will see my submission as constructive and encourage the RTA to be more open and positive in it's dealings with the community.

## **WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT PROCESS?**

- The NSW Road Traffic Authority [RTA], when considering road proposals, engages in dialogue with Government, Business, Contractors and the Road Transport Lobby, peruses plans, suggests/accepts/rejects changes and finally comes to broad agreement with the Government as to what proposal should be put before the community
- The Government and the RTA then issue Terms Of Reference [TOR] for the 'consultative' process that is to follow
- Many of the proposals put before the community by the RTA contain very little information on issues which might be positive or negative to the proposal. A case in point is the holding of 'Community Information' meetings where the RTA hosts a display of photos, maps and brochures with the stated view of informing and gaining feedback from the Community. The attendees are then split into small groups of about 6 people. Generally each group is given a questionnaire with a number of key points for discussion. Participants are asked to decide amongst themselves as to what are the most important points or concerns. Each group then

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selects a spokesperson to present the groups work to the larger grouping. Such sessions tend to discourage any negative concerns about the project being considered and are usually too short to cover all matters requiring attention

- Another tactic is to issue a questionnaire to selected residents, judged by the RTA to be stakeholders, asking for residents to indicate their preference in regard to two or more proposals. No information is provided as to either positive or negative effects of the proposals. The RTA will, of course, claim that it has ‘consulted’ the community. In fact all it has done is given a very small number of individuals the opportunity to take a ‘stab in the dark’ as to which proposal might best suit them
- When it chooses to put proposals to the community the RTA only wants comment on those proposals. It makes no allowance for individuals to ask written questions and to receive answers from the RTA in writing before the closing date for comment
- A major problem is that residents are mostly resource poor and therefore are not on an equal footing with the proponents of a proposal

## **WHY WE NEED EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION.**

Effective community consultation helps to produce the best outcomes. Projects that are understood and accepted by the community are less likely to face opposition or be delayed by community anger.

Good community consultation can produce better, sustainable decisions and save time, frustration and money.

For the RTA to achieve its vision of leadership in sustainable practices, community consultation must be an integral part of project planning and management.

Involving the community in such aspects of RTA business as strategic planning, capital works, major maintenance works, operations can only lead to more efficient & effective results.

Ignoring or delaying community consultation in early project planning risks costly and time consuming objections, adverse budget impacts, poor community relations and adverse publicity that could threaten the RTA’s reputation.

A well thought out approach to community consultation is not a guarantee of protection against these risks. But, ensuring that effective community consultation occurs, can prevent many such problems from arising, resulting in less conflict and speedier resolution.

The RTA needs to recognise that there is a lot of expertise & common sense in the community which is available to it **free of charge**.

The recent consultation farce with regard to the Sikh Punjabi Community in Woolgoolga is a perfect example of the RTA’s inability to connect with the community.

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The RTA was well aware that Option E would have a serious negative effect on a large slice of the Punjabi Community. If it was not aware then that in itself is enough to question the RTA's processes. The RTA made no attempt to call in the Punjabi CLG Representatives or members of the Punjabi Community to explain the ramifications of the decision to go with Option E. Perusal of the minutes of the CLG for this project will make it clear that Option E was the RTA's preferred option all along and that very little real consultation took place.

The Punjabi made an approach to the NSW Community Relations Commission seeking their help to bring the RTA to the negotiating table. This attempt failed, mainly due to the RTA's obstinacy in restricting what could be discussed. The talking never got started.

This is not consultation. Not even by the RTA's poor version as to what constitutes consultation.

The RTA is not providing all the reasons for their decision to select Option E. Indeed the information provided to the community on any option by the RTA left a lot to be desired.

Indeed the RTA makes the extraordinary claim that Option E would have positive impacts for communities living on the existing highway.

The Punjabi Community can have their homes, land and businesses destroyed by Option E but as long as those living along the existing Pacific Highway are OK all is well.

## **THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

- It is a process not an outcome
- There must be a clear understanding on why consultation is taking place and the purpose of the consultation
- It requires recognition that the Road Traffic Authority [RTA] has the mandate to be the decision-maker
- It is about input into the decision-making, not joint decision-making or decision-making by referendum
- It should be transparent and open and all issues should be responded to by the RTA
- Where possible participants should know at the start how their input will be used
- The RTA should always try and take consultation to the target groups rather than expecting them to come to the RTA
- Assessment of the potential and likely impacts on the community of a road activity, plan, policy or proposal
- Establishment of dialogue with the community to take their views into account when planning a road activity, plan, policy or proposal
- Sharing of information and establishing open, two way lines of communication

Community consultation activities may involve many different sectors of the community - individuals and households directly affected by a project, businesses, interest groups, local, state and federal government, statutory authorities, the media, and the general public.

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Community consultation activities are undertaken to:

- gather valuable information and generate new ideas or solutions
- check whether the RTA's perceptions about the best ways of going about a project are in accord with community perceptions
- establish and/or maintain good relationships in order to facilitate current and future activities
- avoid conflict and bad publicity by identifying and addressing concerns at an early stage, and establishing clear communication channels for questions and complaints
- produce proposals which, because they are acceptable to the community, can be effectively and efficiently implemented
- improve and maintain the RTA's image, credibility and community support.

## **DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW**

With early community consultation many, if not most, proposals will be planned and implemented without any conflict with the community or key stakeholders.

The point of community consultation is to inform and draw together the differences in views and see where the common ground lies or where compromises may be made. In doing this, solutions can be found.

If the conflict occurs between a small number of participants, separate discussions between those people may be appropriate. In other situations, it may be more important to reveal the conflict in a public setting. Everyone then has a chance to understand and assist in the resolution of the conflict.

Sometimes conflict cannot be resolved. However, the more work that is done towards understanding the nature of the conflict and why it has arisen will place RTA people and the community in the best position to make the decisions that will ultimately remove the conflict.

## **PITFALLS TO AVOID IN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION INCLUDE:**

- Neglecting a key member or members of the community who may, if aggrieved, delay or obstruct the project.
- Ignoring a significant community issue or impact that will give rise to complaints, obstructions or possibly legal action. It is important to remember that the community may raise issues that are different to those considered important to the RTA.
- Not addressing all issues raised by the community.
- Not allowing enough time in the project timeline for community consultation activities.
- Not establishing open, direct two-way communication lines.
- Providing information that is unintelligible or inaccessible to its target audience.
- In solving one group's problems, creating a new set of problems for another group.
- Not being explicit about the extent of community input that is possible and, thereby, creating unrealistic expectations about the level of influence community members can have on a decision.
- Not providing adequate and timely information
- Not focussing on the issue

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## **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION TOOLS**

Successful and targeted community consultation requires the most appropriate tools to be used.

Which tools, or combination of tools, are to be used depends on the specific proposal, its location and impacts, the issues it raises, the extent of the community impact and what planning or legislative processes the proposal must go through.

Community consultation tools include:

- direct contact by telephone or door-knocking
- meetings (one-on-one, specific groups or public)
- newsletters, letters
- information brochures/booklets
- website
- contact with key community people
- liaison with special interest groups eg. local environment groups
- media liaison and media releases
- advertising
- signage

## **IMPACTS ON THE COMMUNITY**

Potential and likely impacts on the community need to be considered throughout the planning, design and implementation stages of a proposal. By identifying potential impacts at the earliest planning stages, steps can be taken to remove, reduce or make amends for adverse impacts.

When considering potential or likely impacts on the community it is important to remember that for many RTA activities those who benefit may not be the same as those who suffer the impacts.

Impacts on the community can be:

- negative, positive or neutral
- short or long-term
- widespread or narrowly focused in extent
- singular or interrelated or cumulative.

## **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND RTA STAFF**

Planning for community consultation should normally be undertaken prior to detailed design. This will enable RTA staff to allocate adequate time and budget resources and engage specialist community consultation services if required. Most importantly, early community consultation allows for the community's views to be incorporated into project design.

Even for activities with simple community consultation requirements, it is best to identify and plan for them early, as there are inevitable lead times associated with most community relations activities.

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While RTA staff need to ensure that an adequate community consultation process is undertaken and included early in the planning and at every appropriate stage of a project, the community consultation work can be done in-house or by specialist consultants engaged by the RTA.

In some cases, it is better to engage outside consultants who can make community consultation planning and implementation their primary focus. Building the costs of such consultants into budget planning can save time and money in the long run and relieve RTA staff of the primary responsibility for ensuring that community consultation is carried out in a planned, responsive and effective manner.

## **RESOURCES**

Accurate, comprehensive records should be kept of community consultation activities.

Reporting back the results to the community is a very important part of the process as it helps build trust and obtain feedback.

Community consultation activities require resources, which need to be included in the budget.

Items may include:

- specialist service providers in community consultation and communications;
- expenses such as photography, advertising, signs, hire of meeting rooms, letter drops, postage, printing, display materials, graphic design;
- financial or in-kind assistance to enable community members to participate (eg. child care, distribution of information or travel costs)
- the ongoing costs associated with running community consultative committees (eg. attendance fees, venue hire, administration costs, meals)
- other studies, investigations or other actions required as a result of community consultation activities.

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