

## **INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES**

**Organisation:**

**Name:** Mr George Law

**Telephone:**

**Date Received:** 19/08/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

KG & EM LAW

19 AUG 2005

And also at;  
G.A.LAW

15<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

The Hon. Jenny Gardiner MLC  
Chair to the Pacific Highway Inquiry.

**Submission to the Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades.**

Response to the proposed upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Ballina & Woodburn.

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns and opinions on the route selection process currently underway. I am writing on behalf of my 80 year old father, and my family as affected farmers and landholders within the study area. The whole highway upgrade has the potential to destroy our current environment and livelihood. See attached submission to GEOLink in June 2005.

Of the 5 proposed routes, 2 pass through our property and will have serious effects on current and future income derived from agricultural activities and any future diversification, affecting not only the current, but future family members and also local industries and communities. Both routes will seriously affect rare and endangered species of Flora and Fauna as well as wildlife corridors.

**Community Liaison Group:**

We are not aware of any obvious selection process that was undertaken to choose the members of the community liaison group and consider that some appointed members have a vested interest in the final placement of the route. The influential members of the community liaison group have been able to steer the investigation of the various routes away from their own properties.

From the Minutes of C.L.G. meetings and conversations with C.L.G. members available, it appears that there has been **conflict amongst the members of the liaison group and the R.T.A. as to the proposed routes.**

It appears that the proposed routes were already predetermined by the R.T.A. in Sydney and that the community liaison groups were merely window dressing.

## Study Area:

The study area selected passes through unique environmental areas of the State, including low-lying river land, national and state parks, and aboriginal heritage sites. There are specific ecological and geological features and landscape within the proposed routes and the whole area is flood prone. The study areas pass through intensive prime agricultural areas and affect a large number of small land holdings and add to the noise of local towns. Loss of prime agricultural land for small land holders will render farms unviable and effect future earnings of current and future farmers as well as affecting the sugar industry which are to the forefront of sugar reform.

**This area is not suitable for the large scale of upgrade proposed.**

## Why the Rush ?

Why is it necessary to have a quick decision for this particular section of the highway when there are other sections in the State in more urgent need of upgrading?

Is there collusion or a hidden agenda between the State / Federal government and the transport companies who seem intent on pushing through the upgrade? The obvious benefits from this upgrade favour the big trucks which aim to get bigger and don't want to go through towns, traffic lights or hills. These trucks favour a consistent speed and trucking companies have a close interest in having the highway upgraded to ensure travelling times between Sydney and Brisbane are reduced, **and their profit margins increased** with no real benefit to local communities – in fact a detrimental effect on local surroundings and economies.

Is the RTA a bureaucracy devoid of ethics ? **The reliability and accuracy of the statistics gathered by the RTA is questionable:** anecdotal evidence indicates that figures and statistics supplied by Hyder/RTA cannot be substantiated or replicated by independent studies, in particular the results of studies on the environmental flora, fauna and geological formations upon which the routes are constructed.

When the proposed routes are examined closely it is impossible to understand how the routes were determined. It appears that the routes were determined, not by ground investigations but by aerial or other methods in an office in Sydney, as the 5 proposed routes pass through **Remnant Rainforests, Swamplands, Mangrove Fish Nurseries, Endangered Species, Aboriginal Land and Sacred Sites , Intensive Farmland and Peoples Homes.**

Information available suggests that, the rush is to obtain Federal Funding before the end of 2005 and consequently the R.T.A. are pushing a final route through at the expense of the local community.

Community newspaper reports constantly refer to the RTA as failing to listen to the community (see Border Mail paper reports by Nadine Fisher reporting the Banora Point upgrade as an example) and the route selection process for the Ballina-Woodburn and Ewingsdale to Tintenbar upgrades is just another example of poor

community consultation . Constant media reports on the RTA (see Northern Star newspaper ) indicate that there is something wrong in the way they liaise with the community

Are the RTA highway designers more interested in the style and good looks of their new highway and the awards they may obtain from their peers, rather than in the detrimental effect their new highway design will have on community, the environment and the wellbeing of the land holders affected.

RTA designers seem quite interested in having “visual connection opportunities” between the highway and the town (P155 Woodburn to Ballina route selection report) . Designers of the bridge over the Richmond River at Broadwater point out the opportunities for “potential views north and south over Broadwater to Cooks Hill and the Richmond River and the flood plains beyond may be possible from the high point of the bridge.” There are other such statements regarding views or ‘visual impacts’ – their terminology, in this document. Given the speeds expected along this section of the road and the way RTA construct their bridges so that you can’t see out through the side walls, this excitement about the views is odd. Drivers travelling at 110kms per hour have to maintain concentration and really don’t have the time to take in the supposed ‘views’. The regional highway currently in use is far more picturesque than any four laned expressway could be.

Given that a main object of the new highway is to reduce noise in townships, why are three of the proposed route options so close to the township of Broadwater which already suffers from the noise from the sugar mill.

### **Community:**

The concept of upgrading the Pacific Highway to a four lane highway between Sydney and Brisbane is flawed and the combined cost of construction and maintenance is exorbitant. It is not justifiable and does not automatically translate into a decrease in traffic accidents. Roads do not kill people or cause accidents: **people’s bad driving attitudes and habits cause accidents.** .

With the **increase in the ageing population and tourists** using the current Pacific Highway route, a four lane highway isn’t going to provide a faster travelling time for long distance transport. The older driver, tourists and local drivers, drive more slowly, as they conserve fuel ,are more cautious , are more leisurely and will use the upgraded highway for their own convenience. It is expected as fuel prices increase travellers will not travel large distances to go on holidays and will stay closer to the major centres. The exodus from Sydney during holiday periods is already catered for.

How does the compensation, which might be offered, for the loss of agricultural land, replace the contribution that primary production makes to the local economy? Any compensation package cannot cover the future incomes which could be derived from primary production by current or future farmers . How do you **adequately compensate for loss of lifestyle and amenity** ? The R.T.A. will only offer an air conditioner and double glazing !

What effect does the **toxic fumes created from increased traffic** have on the surrounding bio diversity and human life? A four lane highway will concentrate trucks and traffic with all the associated pollution that is generated along the coastal strip. See Media reports of people suffering from the fumes from the increased number of trucks passing as a result of the Burringbar – Yelgin upgrade.

We have been driving the highways between Ballina and Wagga Wagga regularly for 30 years, in all weather conditions and all hours of the day and night and have had no accidents and are well qualified to comment on the changes to highways that have occurred in that time. We now don't go into those towns that are now bypassed on the Highways such as Yass, Goulburn, and Taree and will only stop at those places which are easily accessed for fuel and food such as Marulan, Kempsey and Coffs Harbour as we detest those strategically placed sterile service centres run by major fuel companies preferring to patronise smaller businesses .

Expressway travelling has the effect of keeping you on the road until you need fuel , inexperienced drivers become tired and lose concentration long before they decide to take an 'off' ramp to a service centre. There is no mechanism to make a driver stop at regular intervals, as promoted by the media, on the type of highways being developed now, except for commonsense and it is obvious, that some drivers don't have that. **Highways are boringly easy to drive** and need mental and physical variations such as varying speeds, changes in concentration levels which are required when going through towns or local traffic to break the monotony of driving.

### Alternative Solutions

A flood-free alternative could be through a western route where intensive agriculture is less prevalent eg Grafton, Casino, Kyogle, Murwillumbah route. This would be in line with **the regional road concept of the Pacific Highway** and remove traffic pressure away from the coast as well as being away from low lying river land. A route in this area would assist in the development of these towns.

Has there been sufficient thought given to alternative transport infrastructure apart from upgrading roads that just allow trucks to go faster? **Train systems could be made more viable**, given the increasing fuel costs and damage to the environment caused by expanding road routes to accommodate transports. Are we to end up like the American road system where flyways and expressways dominate the landscape ?

A more realistic and workable option is to separate coastal and local traffic from the national transport route and retain the Pacific Highway for slower moving regional traffic as stated by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources.

What research has been done to **redirect trucks to rail lines**, as in America where trucks are able to travel on rail lines but can. drive on roads once their destination is reached.

A more realistic solution could be a two lane highway upgraded to **a better standard of surface** with regular overtaking sections and a regular maintenance schedule as some of the surfaces of upgraded sections of the highway are already in poor condition.

What effort is being carried out to **reduce and regulate the noise emissions** from trucks? Such as Exhaust Braking, Engine Noise, Types of Tyre Noise. The noise envelope ( pitch and volume ) emitted from these sources of some trucks reaches 2 – 3 klms.

A more **proactive driver education and regular licence retesting program** should be developed and employed. Currently once you get your drivers licence you are not tested again until you are elderly. Drivers can develop bad driving habits in that time ! Penalties for habitual traffic offenders should be extended to permanent loss of licence.

### **Summary**

Please find a copy of our Original objection attached.  
I hope your Inquiry findings bring about a positive outcome for all parties concerned.

Yours sincerely,  
Signed ,  
G. A. Law.  
K. G. Law.  
E. M. Law.