

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

Name: Ms Leyla Roberts

Telephone:

Date Received: 22/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

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Leyla Roberts and Family

Jenny Gardiner
General Purpose Special Committee 4
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

August 19th 2005

Dear Ms Gardiner,

I am writing to you concerning the Inquiry into the Pacific Highway upgrade on the North Coast of NSW, particularly the area between Woodburn and Ballina.

I live in Meerschaum Vale, a quiet, beautiful and fragile area that over the last few years has had a great deal of time and government funding put into flora regeneration and the rehabilitation of acid sulphate soils.

It has been a very worrying time for the residents of this precious coastal area, and I feel that I must comment on several issues regarding the RTA's submission process.

I attended a meeting at our local hall on May 31st along with 240 concerned residents, representatives from the Ballina Council, members from the CLG, Ian Cohen, S□Zteve Cansdell and who was representing the RTA.

It was immediately clear that the consultation process has been embarrassingly inadequate for many reasons. We discovered at the meeting that the final date for written submissions was June 20th (later extended to July 5th), which left little time for any informed public discussion. The CLG had been selected without public consultation, and been forced to swear under oath not to disclose any information to the general public; this in itself could be considered to be a very divisive process.

The RTA representative, from Hyder C□□onsulting came to that meeting so unprepared that it was rather embarrassing. He could answer very few of the questions from the public, and had to refer to maps that had been supplied by one of the local residents.

Apparently the RTA held a number of community information sessions in late 2004. These were supposed to inform the public that the planning stage had been reached. Many people, myself included, knew nothing about the proposed upgrade or any meetings regarding it. People whose properties are directly affected were not even contacted by the RTA.

A brochure finally arrived from the RTA on May 30th. It provided some very poorly detailed maps, and display locations on the back cover. To obtain a clearer picture I visited the Lismore Motor Registry on June 3rd, only to be told that there were no maps available for public display. My mother owns a property in Uralba, less than 2 kilometres from Route 3A. She did not receive any information at all from the RTA regarding the possible change of route, so I phoned the RTA on June 9th requesting that an information package be sent to her. To this date, nothing has arrived.

The RTA website was and still is lacking any detail and is always late to be updated.

It is clear that the public do not figure very highly in the selection process. The RTA appears to be just running through the motions.

The public of course realizes that the Pacific Highway is at a crisis point. It cannot safely carry the current amount of traffic, especially the 1500 B-double trucks that pass through Ballina every day. It seems to me that upgrading the Pacific Highway will just make it more convenient for more B-doubles to use the Pacific Highway as a transport route. We are under the impression that the New England Highway is a designated transport corridor and the Pacific Highway is a regional road. We feel that the funding should be used to revitalise the rail system and develop the road/rail potential, which in view of the pending oil crisis must be addressed now before we spend any more money on the Pacific Highway.

Probably the most worrying aspect of the future upgrade of the Highway is its affects on the environment. The Blackwall Range is a very beautiful rural area consisting of low lying mountains, a lot of which is densely forested and is of a significant environmental value. Several botanists have brought to our attention the drastic impact that a re-routing through the range will have on the environment. I am not a scientist, but I have noted many mistakes and unprofessional omissions in the environmental impact statement provided by Geolyse, including some terrible typos and misnaming of species. I also noted that the document was provided by a company outside the district. Why not employ a company from within the district who is more aware of the local flora and fauna? Recent floods have proven that the escarpment area is particularly prone to land slips, and the low-lying areas are unstable, due to deep sand, silt and mud layers. There is no doubt that the land

structure within the study area is extremely fragile; this has been ill-considered in the geo-physical data that has been made available to the public. It is clear that more detailed studies of the environment need to be undertaken and made available for public consultation.

Finally, we feel that the public consultation process is a farce. The environmental impact statement is embarrassingly inadequate and unprofessional. The RTA has been extremely inefficient and has not provided the public with enough information, and what it has provided has been severely lacking in detail. We are an intelligent population, and will not be divided or hoodwinked by a careless public service that is clearly unable to do its job at a time when we should be looking for alternative, safer, cleaner and more responsible options.

We feel that an upgrade of such huge proportions would be expensive, destructive and clearly a very short term solution to our transport problems. We trust that you will consider all these issues.

Yours sincerely

Leyla Roberts and family

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