

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR

Organisation: Sikh Council Of Australia
Name: Mr Bawa Singh Jagdev
Position: Secretary
Telephone:
Date Received: 7/11/2005

Subject:

Summary

Sikh Council Of Australia Inc

170- Ninth Avenue Austral N.S.W 2179

Sunday, 6 November 2005

The Director,
General Purpose Standing Committee No 4,
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to the Standing Committee for the inquire into the Pacific Highway Upgrade, Coffs Harbour by-pass

Sikh Council Of Australia is the apex representative body of the Sikhs in Australia. It was established to act as a spokes body of the Sikhs in Australia, to safeguard the interests of the Sikh community, Sikh religion and its member organizations, and to represent the Sikhs, both at public and private levels, and to raise awareness of the Sikh culture and cultural heritage amongst the Australian. Majority of the Sikh Organisations/Sikh Temples are its members.

Council is very much concerned about the impacts, the proposed Pacific Highway Upgrade will have on the Sikh farming community in Woolgoolga. Woolgoolga is a town of very close-knit Sikh community and the main source of income and employment, specially of the elder members of the community, is Agriculture and most of the Farms are owned and managed by the members of the extended families of the Farmers, which also provide employment to other people in and around Woolgoolga.

The proposed by-pass (preferred Option E) of the Pacific Highway Project by the RTA will acquire part or whole of the farming lands of about 16 Farmers which will deprive them and the people who work on the Farms, of the only means they have, to support their families. Properties which lie on the boundary of the proposed By-pass will in the long term be devalued.

The Sikh community of Woolgoolga wasn't happy and raised their concern against the proposed preferred Option E, which was being forced upon them by the RTA, so to discuss the affects and implications of the proposed preferred Option E the Community Relations Commission convened a meeting of the RTA representatives, the representatives of the Woolgoolga Sikh Community and the Sikh Council Of Australia, on 13th September 2005, at the Pelican Resort Coffs Harbour, which was chaired by the Community Relations Commissioner Mr. Kerkaysharian AM. From the facts presented and the subsequent discussion which ensued at the joint meeting, Sikh Council strongly believes that Woolgoolga Sikh community is being unfairly treated by the RTA, because:

1-Failure on the part of RTA to consult the Sikh Community:

- No consideration was given by the RTA to involve the Sikh Community in the development and decision making procedures and discussions which led the RTA to believe that Option E, would be the preferred option for the project and the community. Although Option E is costing much more (\$15 million) than the other option (C1) in which not more than three Sikh farmers were affected, yet RTA is not willing to consider that option.
- There are three representative bodies of the Sikhs (Gurudwaras) in Woolgoolga and instead of writing to or asking these representative bodies to appoint/send their representatives on the “**Community Focus Group**”, RTA appointed some one of their own choice; and that too not from the Sikh Community but from the “Banana Industry Group” who, in three years attended only one of the meetings, and wasn’t even present at the crucial “ **Value Management Workshop**” to raise concerns of the Sikh community.
- Since there was no representation or consultation with or input from, the Woolgoolga Sikh Community, there is no justification in RTA’s claim that Option E would be the preferred option and best for the Sikh community.
- Instead of imposing their unilateral decision, of the preferred Option E, on the Sikh Community, had the decision been made with the full participation and involvement of the Sikh Community the outcome would have been more acceptable, less hurting and controversial.

2-Socio-cultural and cultural impacts

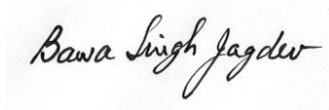
- It is a fact of life that to gain an employment in any field except to work as a Farm labourer, one has to have an appropriate level of education. But these Farmers and their families have lived and worked, all their lives on their Farms, without giving any thought of getting even the basic education,----they have very poor command of the English language – and for them to find a job, once they have been uprooted, will be next to impossible and an uphill battle.
- Adoption and implementation of RTA’s preferred option, E, will have devastating affect on the, displaced Sikh families, socio-economic setup and the socio-cultural environment of the whole region and the heritage and cultural values of the Sikhs, which they have preserved so dearly over the years will be lost for ever.

Conclusion

- Whereas the Sikh Council agrees that the Pacific Highway Project has to go ahead, RTA should give due consideration to safeguarding the livelihood and wellbeing of the people who have spent their life times on their Farms, so that minimum number of the Farmers are uprooted by their choice of the preferred option for the by-pass.
- Sikh Council is strongly of the view and submits that the RTA should reconvene the consultation process with the full involvement of the Sikh community and Option E

should not be the preferred option and consider accepting the bypass route in which minimum number of the Sikh families are being uprooted.

Submitted for your consideration,
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bawa Singh Jagdev". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Bawa Jagdev
Secretary
Sikh Council of Australia Inc