

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

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Date Received: 19/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

11 AUG 2005
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Legislative Council NSW
Parliamentary Enquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades
19th August 2005

We would like to thank the Legislative Council for establishing the Inquiry, to report on the impact of the proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway. It allows us as representatives of Agricultural Industry, particularly the Value Adding Agribusiness area to contribute to and hopefully influence the decision makers of the RTA and State Government to have a good hard look at the devastating impact that a 6 lane Los Angeles type freeway will have on the rich diverse agricultural land of this area.

Please find attached our submission for the Parliamentary Inquiry. The submission emphasises the uniqueness and importance of the Agricultural Industry and associated Value Adding businesses which are situated in the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar Study area.

With this, we formally request the opportunity to present our submission in person to the Standing Committees of the Legislative Council.

Yours Sincerely,

Martin & Pam Brook

SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
INQUIRY
PROPOSED PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES
By Pam & Martin Brook of Brookfarm

Our submission has three main areas of concern.

- The impact of the highway planning on prime agricultural land
- The reasons for expanding the study area of the Highway upgrade from St Helena to Tintenbar
- The level of upgrade proposed for this section of the highway

THE IMPACT OF THE HIGHWAY PLANNING ON PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND

In comparing the St Helena to Tintenbar study area to many other regions along the Pacific Highway it is essential to recognize the unique conditions, which apply to this study area.

The farmland in this region has been recognized by the State Government as some of the most valuable farmland in the State. Over 90% of the land in the study area is listed as State Significant Farmland or Regionally Significant Farmland

The Department of State and Regional Development has recognized this region and the agribusinesses in the study area as an Industry area of the highest importance. This has been demonstrated in a number of ways. The State government is currently providing programmes specifically directed at enhancing the growing agribusiness food processing sector of the region through its recent Stepping Up program, Export development programmes and ongoing Industry Expansion programmes.

The State government recognises the importance of the agricultural land in the study area yet the RTA proposes to build a road through the middle of this most important region with the highest number of value adding businesses/acre of any area in the North Coast. If the proposed superhighway does go ahead, it will cause permanent and irreparable damage. This sector is experiencing rapid growth and is already representing a vitally important part of the regions economy.

Austrade & DSRD have used Brookfarm as an example for other would-be value adders, of a company that has successfully taken a raw product and created internationally marketable food products.

Agribusiness case study

Brookfarm

Brookfarm is situated at St Helena on 96 acres, directly adjacent to all the proposed tunnel routes. Brookfarm is one of Australia's leading producers of value added gourmet macadamia products and has an international reputation for producing Australia's finest macadamia products.

Brookfarm value adding to rural and regional areas

Brookfarm provides many benefits for the regional community through its value adding business.

We value add to macadamias and provide products to the premium quality markets throughout Australia and overseas. Within Australia we have over 1000 outlets. We are an export-focused company and in the last 12 months have achieved sales in over 200 outlets in the Mid West USA and have recently appointed distributors for the West and East Coast of the USA.

Overseas buyers regularly visit our property and their choice of Brookfarm products for their gourmet export markets is based on our farm's clean & green image and likewise the other farms that supply us. This image and practice has been the deciding factor in recently won contracts to Japan and the USA. For example the largest and most important Gourmet Food distributor in the USA is a company called European Imports, based in Chicago. We were fortunate that the head buyer actually came to Australia and visited our farm at St. Helena. Her decision to take the range was based not only on the quality of the product but the unique environment where the raw product was grown in. She was so impressed with the natural beauty of the area and is now looking at taking other Byron Hinterland products.

Our clean and green farm story and the success of our products being a paddock to plate story has now seen our products taken by the prestigious Whole Foods chain in the USA, This has occurred in the last 2 weeks. This has the potential to double or triple our planned export growth for the next 6 years. Our entry to this market has been brought about by a combination of factors but the most important one was again a farm visit to see the story of agriculture and Brookfarm in the region. If we had a six-lane highway running through or adjacent to our farm, including our neighboring suppliers, the outcome would have been quite different.

Brookfarm works with more than 190 businesses within the local region.

The ingredients for our products come from clean and green areas of the highest farming credentials. We use all the nut from our own farm and source locally from 2 other large macadamia farms within the study zone at the northern end. Like our farm these are crucial parts of our supply chain.

A vital part of our success is the quality of our raw kernel. With our 96 acres we have created a unique eco system. In the areas not planted with macadamia we have 3 Eucalypt

forests and a 15,000 tree rainforest that sits in the very middle of our commercial plantation. This has created an environment that supports a rich diversity of flora and fauna and plays a vital role in the growing of the macadamias. The forest is home to predator bugs that minimize the use of sprays. Owls also live in the forests and the rat problem; the curse of mature Macadamia orchards has been eliminated. A breeding pair of owls eats up 2000 rats and mice a year. Poisonous baiting stopped 3 years ago and our rat damage is less than 0.2% per year. A six-lane highway running alongside or through our farm will destroy this unique eco – system.

Below is a brief assessment over the next 10 years of our business's contribution to the local economy in terms of employment and service industries usage. These figures have been taken from detailed forward planning budgets based on conservative export and domestic growth.

Regional Inputs	2005-2007	2005-2111
Wages	\$728,000	\$4,744,817
Retail Sales Regionally	\$250,000	\$1,750,000
Ingredient & Packaging supplies	\$600,000	\$4,000,000
Service industries including transport	\$250,000	\$2,000,000

Our company's growth has a large flow on effect to our employees and to regional businesses that we supply or who supply us with services and ingredients. These benefits stay locally and stimulate the regional economy.

Employment growth

We create career employment opportunities in our company from production worker positions through to sales and marketing positions both domestically and internationally.

We will create the following regional employment opportunities:

10 new positions in the next two years

26 new positions in the next eight years

Business growth

Our growth as a manufacturing business provides further growth for new industries in the area that support businesses like ours.

Brookfarm over the next 7 years will put over \$25,000,000 into the local economy. If you add sales benefits, which our retail customers reap and put into the economy, you would add another \$15,000,000 within Australia in that same time frame.

Economic and social benefits outside of the region.

Our company policy is to use all Australian ingredients and we only use an imported ingredient if no Australian product is available. This policy has strong flow on effects.

We source product ingredients from all over Australia from producers in regional areas.

We source from all regions of Australia usually buying direct from the growers. Materials supplies from regional areas in 05-07 for muesli alone will inject over \$600,000 into regional Australia.

As we grow the benefits flow on to our regional suppliers. If our growth ceases the benefits are lost

The potential business damage

If our farm and ability to value add is destroyed or severely compromised (clean and green farming next to a six lane highway is not possible!) The cost to the local economy in the next 7 years alone would be the loss of the above budgeted income of \$25,000,000 and over 30 jobs. The wider economic loss would be far greater.

THE REASONS FOR EXPANDING THE STUDY AREA OF THE HIGHWAY UPGRADE FROM ST HELENA TO TINTENBAR

7 years ago the Agricultural and agribusinesses in this study area planned their future. The Ballina bypass and Ewingsdale to Bangalow upgrades were planned and publicised after extensive community consultation processes, the Bangalow bypass had already been completed a number of years prior. Farmers and businesses invested with confidence.

In 2004 the revisiting of all these areas was announced.

Now these businesses and farmers are put again in limbo while the RTA revisits the entire process. Investment is on hold. Agribusinesses are not by definition easily locatable because of the time to plant and bring plantations or crops to commercial and viable production levels. This can be up to 10 years for crops such as macadamias. The majority of crops and agribusinesses in the study area are unique to the area because of the climatic conditions, landscape and soil types.

The region as a marketing brand is also essential to many of these businesses and to relocate out of the Byron Shire would be disastrous, marketing and export plans are built on selling where the agribusiness is located.

Other groups such as CEPS have made submissions about the extension of the study area at the Ballina end.

However at the review of the Ewingsdale to Bangalow sector was apparently as a result of the RTA's Pacific Highway noise taskforce committee.

There was no valid representation of the rural sector on this taskforce, nor any residents from the St Helena, which is, affected daily by noise. It appears that the loudest interest groups were involved but a broader community representation was not demonstrated.

Assumptions appear to have been made that a tunnel proposition through St Helena would be quieter for the residents of Ewingsdale as all the blame has been placed on the current slope of the road up St Helena.

Noise walls were recommended for but have still not been put in place. The residents of Ewingsdale have been given the false impression that a tunnel through St Helena is the only result that will solve their problem. This is patently not the case. RTA engineers have concerns that the noise problem of Ewingsdale is far more complex than this.

No scientific and reproducible noise studies have been done separating the noise effects on Ewingsdale from the upper 50% of the hill from the lower 50% of the hill.

The result is the review of the study area came from a **one-issue** agenda whereas the needs of the new study area are far more complex than just one issue. The economic impact and loss of prime agricultural land have been identified by community consultation as the **most important** issues to the majority of study area. The original planned routes minimize these concerns and were supported by extensive community consultation prior to 1999.

This revisiting of the planned highway also means there is no certainty or guarantee that the entire process won't be repeated in the future should regional planning change again.

THE LEVEL OF UPGRADE PROPOSED FOR THIS SECTION OF THE HIGHWAY

There is no doubt that the Pacific highway needs to be made safer and upgraded to dual carriageway. However the criteria for the upgrade is overkill to what is needed. It appears to be designed to suit the purposes of Interstate freight and large B doubles.

We strongly feel that the interstate freight should be kept to the New England Highway, which should be appropriately upgraded. The Pacific Highway should not be gazetted for B doubles, as it is at present patently unsafe for this. This is one of the most heavily populated regions in coastal NSW, and the mix of heavy vehicles with tourism and regional traffic is a recipe for disaster no matter how big the road is.

It is the excessive use of the Pacific Highway by heavy trucks for interstate transport that creates the noise issues for all communities in our region.

If the heavy truck traffic was returned to the New England highway, the Pacific Highway could be safely upgraded along essentially its existing route and the majority of

community concerns including economic concerns, protection of prime agricultural land, noise and health issues would be addressed.

Martin Brook

Pam Brook

Brookfarm