

**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO
MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES**

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Subject:

Summary

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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE INC.

CHAIR,

THE COMMITTEE
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 4

INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES

The Brunswick Heads Chamber of Commerce wishes to express its great disappointment with the Government's decision to close our branch line and discontinue our rail service.

Firstly, let me provide you with some background information.

Brunswick Heads is situated in the Byron Shire. It lies 20 kilometres north of Byron Bay and 8 kilometres to the east of Mullumbimby, which is our nearest railway town.

Prior to the last XPT service on May 16, the XPT to Sydney would depart Mullumbimby at 10.28pm. A bus service to link with the train at Mullumbimby was discontinued several years ago. Therefore passengers of the rail service would need to organise a lift to the station or catch a taxi, which can be costly for those people on low incomes. Nevertheless, many residents from the Brunswick Valley would utilise this service as it suited their individual circumstances. Many Brunswick Heads residents are over 65 years of age and have retired to our town, yet they maintain strong family ties with family members living in Sydney and southern New South Wales. The closure of the line and replacement with coaches does not suit many in our community for a variety of reasons. I will not go into detail but suffice to say our communities would like to have had input into a decision of this magnitude.

On another related issue, the opening of the Yelgun- Chinderah Pacific Highway upgrade last year has meant that Brunswick Heads along with other towns within the shire has experienced an increasing numbers of day visitors travelling by car and coach. These visitors are primarily from the Gold Coast and Brisbane and other parts of South East Queensland. Late last year the Brunswick Heads Chamber jointly sponsored a "Taking Care of Brunswick" town forum that involved local residents developing a community and economic development strategy for Brunswick Heads.

Some of the issues highlighted included:

1. Heavy traffic on the Brunswick River Bridge and an increasing freeway noise problem.
2. A large and growing parking problem.
3. The poor condition of local roads.
4. Inadequate bikeways.
5. A lack of Public Transport.

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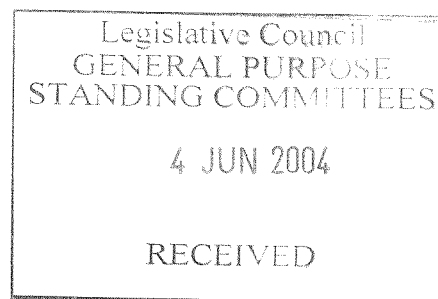
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We know the Victorian Government has recently upgraded some of their regional rail lines, in particular, the passenger train to Bairnsdale, the gateway to one of Victoria's most popular tourist destinations, the East Gippsland lakes. With

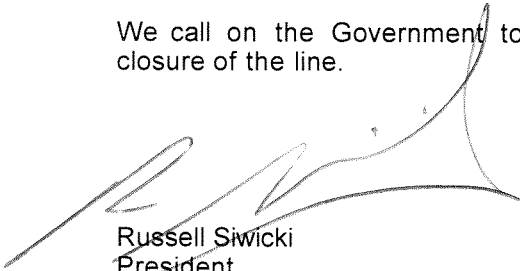
affordable return fares it is anticipated the train service could drive resurgence in travel to that region.

The Lismore-Mullumbimby section of the Casino- Murwillumbah Branch line celebrated its 110th year of operation on 15th May 2004. This rail line offers passengers during daytime travel some of the most scenic views one could imagine. For example, last year a Hunter Valley based motor rail ran services between Mullumbimby and Bangalow via Byron Bay over a Saturday and Sunday. Hundreds of people of all ages gathered at Mullumbimby Railway Station to take the journey. Passengers would view Mount Chincogan, traverse sugar cane, banana and dairy farms; journey past Paperbark swamp forest, sub-tropical rainforest remnants with spectacular northeast views of Julian Rocks and the South Pacific Ocean. This is all within a 40-kilometre rail journey.

A recent report by the NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Resources indicated the Richmond-Tweed area would be heading toward a third of a million people by 2031. Therefore it is imperative that the Ministry of Transport, Tourism NSW and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources do some serious transport planning encompassing ALL transport modes including Rail, Road and Air. The freight issue is impacting on our neighbouring town of Ocean Shores with increasing noise on the highway impacting on residents. With construction to begin soon on the Brunswick-Yelgun Pacific Highway upgrade, locals and tourists can expect lengthy delays during the next few years. Thus, it makes no sense to close an integral transport link such as our rail branch line.

In conclusion we call on the State government to immediately resume the rail service to Murwillumbah and investigate options for extending the rail service to the Gold Coast. There are numerous benefits for our town and region including employment generation, tourism potential, access to Queensland health services, reduction in greenhouse gases and improvement in social amenity.

We call on the Government to take notice of public sentiment regarding the closure of the line.



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