

## INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

**Organisation:**

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**Telephone:**

**Date Received:** 23/08/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

11 August 2005

Mr Steven Reynolds  
Parliamentary Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades  
The Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Reynolds and other members of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4,

**PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE – WOODBURN TO BALLINA BYPASS AND  
B-DOUBLES AND STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLANS**

I am making a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry as a resident within the study area of the Woodburn to Ballina Pacific Highway Upgrade, and as a person whose family home and heritage are elsewhere within the study area. I am planning, in the near future, to establish an office and business in the town of Broadwater. I have lived almost my entire life within the study area and have most of my friends, and family friends, within the study area. My grandparents and parents lived and spent most of their lives in the study area. This is my country.

As a person with strong ties to the community and the local area I am extremely concerned that the Roads and Traffic Authority's (RTA) has proposed all route options with unnecessary impacts on people and places. One has to question whether this is a strategy on the RTA's behalf to divide community members. Minimising impacts to individual properties within the route options has been disregarded and rather than avoid someone's house, entirely possible and still achieving the RTA's desired angle round corners etc, they choose to put the route over the top of people's houses. The Community Liaison Group (CLG) developed route options that considered the RTA's constraints and still manage to avoid all but one house. **Surely, when the RTA were given the power to do as they please, they were not given the right to abuse that power, and to show a lack of compassion for the communities they are disrupting and destroying.** It appears, on and below the surface, that the RTA is exhibiting the behaviour of a tyrant.

It is important myself and the people of the North Coast of NSW that the government has processes in place that enable the community to feel comfortable with, and that these processes demonstrate genuine transparency and foresight from our government. I also expect that the processes of the RTA are inclusive, as the term "Community Consultation" suggests. The process being run by the RTA has made our community feel insignificant, futile, excluded, deceived and manipulated. I do not believe that is acceptable from a government department.

This submission contains the following sections:

- The Roads and Traffic Authority's Project Management – regarding the approach to the proposal regarding the Pacific Highway Upgrade as it has transpired (Term of Reference 3. Other related matters) ATTACHMENT 1,
- Highway, rail and B-Doubles – regarding the current situation and options (Terms of Reference 1e, 1f, 1i and 3.) ATTACHMENT 2, and
- The Woodburn to Ballina Upgrade (Terms of Reference 2a, 2b, 2c, and 3) ATTACHMENT 3, including attachments 3a, 3b and 3c relating to the environmental, social and economic values of the study area and issues with proposed route options.

This submission contains only a proportion of the issues and examples of concern to myself. I look forward to having my submission considered independently of the RTA. However, I am concerned at the newspaper article in the Sydney Morning Herald (20 June 2005), which highlighted that Parliamentary Inquiries are a waste of money with no action. It appears that State and Federal Government inquiries are ineffectual in achieving outcomes on the ground and are simply there to make the community feel adequately engaged. I, and I am sure the rest of the community, expect more from this Inquiry.

Many of the affected residents are farmers, people with a long history with the area, 4<sup>th</sup> generation landowners, the local Bundjalung Aboriginal community, people seeking a saner world. This is a special area and from the expressions made at public meetings, it is obvious the residents and/or landowners in the affected areas (Woodburn, Wardell, Broadwater, Meerschaum Vale, Buckombil, west Wardell, Cabbage Tree Island, Bagotville, Riley's Hill and Riley's Hill Road, west Broadwater, east Dungarubba, and Coolgardie) are all dismayed at this process and lack of consideration to humanity.

Given the contents of my submission, **I do not believe that the community within the study area, the Richmond River-Valley towns and communities, should be required to suffer an avoidable and irreplaceable legacy** as a result of poor project planning, management and attitude on the RTA and their consultant's part.

Before any of this area is allowed to be destroyed, I invite you and other relevant Ministers, and the Premier of NSW to come to our area and meet with our community, our community of farmers, conservationists, white and blue collar workers, and Aboriginal people. We are the diversity of our society, yet we all have a common interest, the beauty and special qualities of the area we live in and call "paradise".

I am prepared to expand upon the comments in this submission should the Standing Committee require further information. I will make myself available to the Inquiry and for any visits to the local area. Please don't hesitate to contact me at the above address, or on

Yours faithfully,

MARIA MATTHES

## **ATTACHMENT 1: RTA Management of Project**

The following is a list of my concerns with the RTA's management of the project:

- It appears that significant and important contributions, relevant to the process, made by many of our Community Liaison Group representatives have been largely dismissed and/or considered as trivial, minor or irrelevant;
- Letters were sent to residents, almost two months after the date on the letter, advising of the RTA's initial public meeting about the Upgrade. That is, the letters were received 6 weeks after the meeting was held, with some residents not receiving a letter;
- The RTA website has not been adequately updated, eg, it was advised that the proposed route options would be available for public comment on the 23 May 2005. This is the date the exhibition period commences. On the morning of 24 May 2005, the route options were not available, and it was noted that notes from the Community Liaison Group meetings are only provided to January 2005. I know that meetings were also held in February, March, April and May. Additionally, no minutes are provided of specialist meetings eg environmental, floodplain, etc meetings are available for community review or consideration. Further more, there were no community updates provided on the website between January and April. This has not improved over time;
- The members of the Community Liaison Group were required to sign confidentiality agreements, which effectively excluded the remainder from the community from having relevant input and even knowing the process that was occurring;
- Attempts by many residents and landowners to phone the RTA, were mostly met with answering machines, and in many cases, calls were not been followed up within a reasonable time, if at all. This continues to be expressed in community discussions as an on-going frustration for residents in the study area;
- The Community Update in January indicated that a permanent shopfront would be available in February, and this was not provided until May. The Community Update for April was simply to announce this shopfront and cannot really be considered an update. This is particularly relevant when one considers the amount of "flawed" information the RTA had collected and that they were about the release route options in the next few weeks based on that information;
- The public meetings with the RTA have been limited by both the poor number of meetings, and the suitability of times and venues for attendance;
- The maps provided for the proposed route options are relatively ambiguous, such that residents cannot determine what direct and indirect impacts each route would have. The RTA has simply advised people that if they want to see where their property is in relation to the proposed routes they can go to Woodburn to have a look at maps with greater detail. I question why these maps could not have been provided to the community as the handout with route options, particularly when I and many others could not get to Woodburn during the submission period;
- It appears the RTA has provided route options that it told the Community Liaison Group were not going to be included, or were placed in locations that were never discussed by the CLG. Much to the surprise of Group Representatives, options they believed were excluded were now appearing in the community's mail. In this regard, the RTA appear to have deceived the Community Liaison Group. In addition, the location of many route options presented and discussed by the Group, have been ignored. These members have the best interests of the community in their efforts. They have designed options with consideration to the RTA's issues of constraints, and to minimise the impact on each of these issues and constraints, on the community, on agricultural viability, and on the environment. Whereas the RTA's proposed route options appear to unnecessarily increase impacts, such as to division of towns, and agricultural properties and their viability.

- The RTA appears to have provided route options for the community to make submissions about that are not, for all intents and purposes, genuine route options. Many examples are available, for example, several community members have heard that the people doing some of the studies could not get footings for bridge crossing after drilling over 40 metres, and that a \$50000 drill bit was lost in the mud. If the RTA cannot get footings then surely they cannot propose an option in these areas. Another example, in an area of one route option the hill is full of springs and the efforts to find bedrock went to 30 m and the core holes filled with water before they had finished. It would appear the maps released by the RTA containing proposed route options are at best deceptive and based on misinformation. How, under these circumstances, can the community make relevant submissions? The RTA should be required to undertake their studies and provide genuine options with constraints fully costed. No business decides to put its money into the most expensive options when more cost-effective options can be found, such as those proposed by CLG members;
- The rushed of the studies for this proposal and the rushed release date are considered inadequate for the nature and complexities of the study area. These are discussed in Attachments 3a-c social, environmental and economic impacts. At a public meeting it was raised that the RTA spent several years gathering data for route options along several upgrades, so when one compares the timeframes allowed for these studies, possibly in less sensitive and complex areas, the accuracy and adequacy of the studies for this proposed upgrade must be heavily scrutinised;
- I was feeling rather frustrated, at a community meeting, where Hyder Consulting, representing the RTA, said that the community now have the opportunity to have input to the RTA on matters of concern. Our Community Liaison Group has already attempted to raise the issues that we, as a community, would be raising in our submissions, and have already provided to CLG members. It seems futile to bother given that the RTA has already ignored these issues;

I am concerned, that from this poorly managed community consultation, the next the community will hear from the RTA is a single route option affecting part of our community. I question how these decisions can be made in the absence of a full review of the matters to be considered. I also understand that it is still some months before a final route is selected and further detailed studies will be undertaken in relation to that route. However, I am concerned that once a final route is selected it will not be changed. This is because the feasibility of alternative routes (ie the current route option choices) will not have been properly considered as a result of the RTA's apparently deliberate misrepresentation of genuine constraints.

## **ATTACHMENT 2: "Highway, Rail, B-Doubles"**

I am also concerned at the reluctance of the government to look objectively at providing infrastructure that addresses the growth of the area, the character of the area and the sensitivity of the landscape within the study area. This area (from Grafton to the Queensland border) is special and should be treated uniquely. I do not believe, the major upgrade of the Highway, required to accommodate Double-B's trucks, is required to such an extent if alternative strategies are implemented. This section is intended to address matters in relation to the following terms of reference of the Inquiry:

- 1 e) the impacts of B-Doubles on the Pacific Highway;
- 1 f) the impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing interstate and local transport;
- 1 i) existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task; and
- 3) any other related matters.

1 e) and 1 f) I do not consider it appropriate to have all B-Doubles on the Pacific Highway. For example, it was stated at a public meeting that about 1500 trucks, including B-Doubles, pass through Ballina most days. The RTA said that even if interstate trucks were removed from the Pacific Highway one-third of trucks would still go to or pass Ballina. This is still a significant reduction of 1000 trucks per day. Since the trucks stopped using the New England Highway, trying to cross (on foot or by car) the Pacific Highway at Broadwater is now a difficult and dangerous task.

I have had numerous adverse experiences involving semi-trailers and B-Doubles. At times these events have left me shaking and concerned for my life and others. I have regularly called truck companies to advise of their drivers and on occasion have felt the need to report the incident to the Police. However, I think one recent example highlights the issue. I was driving between the Tweed and Ballina at night. I was overtaken by a truck exceeding the speed limit by at least 20km. He was then slowed by a car in front. He proceeded to tail-gate the car in front and nearly jack-knifing the truck as the car in front slowed to turn corners. The trailer on the truck was at such an angle when the truck turned a corner I thought it was going to tip over. He was dangerously overtaking on the overtaking lanes and crossing double lines on corners and crests. During this experience I wondered what I could do. I was hardly in a position or location to do anything. After a couple of kilometres of this constant display of disregard for the safety of others on the road, I overtook the car in front of me, got behind the truck and honked my horn and flashed my lights at him. He slowed down and started to drive more responsibly. Within five minutes he was at it again. Then he pulled over just before Ballina and overtook me again just after Ballina. When I got home and was shakily relaying my experience to friends they said that "I had probably given the truckie a warning and he'd stopped to have some speed and be ready for the rest of the trip". I believe they were probably right and I find that the RTA has not taken this seriously is a poor reflection on the government.

The Pacific Highway apparently does not suitable foundations to support the weight and amount of traffic, in particular the amount of heavy traffic. This has resulted in the constant road degradation, sometimes with potholes several inches deep being experienced. After rain the roads must be repaired for safety. The long term maintenance cost must be considered and compared in relation to the costs of maintaining the New England Highway (built on rock).

I believe this issue must be addressed now. It will be over ten years before any highway bypass-upgrade is completed. The Pacific Highway cannot cope with the ever-increasing

number of trucks and B-Doubles on the Pacific Highway, let alone increase in domestic and tourist traffic. I acknowledge the pressure to have the highway upgraded and towns bypassed, due to the increasing number of truck accidents; the intention to have triple-trailer trucks transporting goods (of great concern is this proposal); and for the State to meet its commitments to the Federal Government. However, I do not consider that rushing this proposal through will alleviate any of these issues in the short term (ie the next ten to 15 years). I am supportive of an immediate solution, as proposed and supported by many at the recent Roads Summit in Ballina, that is, to immediately require B-Doubles and future triple trailers' to use the New England Highway. Road trains on the coast are not acceptable.

1 i) I am concerned that at present there are numerous strategies, plans, working groups and taskforces from various government departments that are all drawing lines on maps for regional planning, including provision of major roads. These lines appear to be drawn using data even more limited than the RTA has available. Are the outcomes of these processes going to be consistent with each other or be a band-aid solution to a cancerous situation? Government money is being wasted through these poorly run planning processes.

There is already a rail infrastructure framework across the country that should be expanded and developed. I fully support any proposal that opens and increases the rail infrastructure, making our roads safer. My recommendations include consideration to the following opportunity:

rail infrastructure is available along the coastline. This should be used to move freight. For example, centres would be available at Urunga, Coffs Harbour, Macksville, Grafton, Lismore, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, etc. I am sure there are more lines and stations available. Trucks (not B-Doubles) would pick up local freight and deliver it locally. This would create local employment through the need for truck drivers, forklift drivers, site managers etc. This would also improve relationships between truck drivers and their families, who would have more time together and not having to worry of their return.

Rail has to be the way of the future. In 1984 when I was in California, USA, I was stopped at a rail-crossing. After several minutes of watching rail carriage after carriage carrying potatoes across the country, I started to count them. I counted 64 carriages full of potatoes and an extra engine. I estimate at least 150 carriages of potatoes past me. Imagine the trucks that are needed to transport that quantity of freight across Australia, and the extra cost. It is time for planning for the future. I urge this government to leave a legacy that rural NSW can be proud of.

### **ATTACHMENT 3**

#### **Proposed Upgrade of Pacific Highway between Ballina and Woodburn**

This section is intended to address matters in relation to the following terms of reference of the Inquiry:

- 2 a) impact on prime agricultural land;
- 2 b) impact on flooding in the mid-Richmond area;
- 2 c) impact on communities at Broadwater and Woodburn; and
- 3) any other related matters.

Basically, I do not like any of the RTA's proposed route options. They are all ludicrous for different reasons. These are issues that the Community Liaison Group has apparently already raised, and appear to have thus been largely ignored in the development of these route options.

2 a) Routes have been developed that have unnecessarily impacted on prime agricultural land. The cane farming community has made it clear that they afford, with compensation, to lose the edges of some cane farms, but they cannot afford to lose the viability of the farms, as would result with all options. The cane farmers are supportive of the flood-free route (virtually) developed by some members of the CLG. This route has one minor impact on one cane farm, but has been designed in such a way as to allow the continued functioning and viability of that farm. This is because the route has been designed to cross the farm where the road would also cross the highway, thereby allowing farm machinery to pass underneath the bridge crossing. This is the alternative to the RTA option that divided this person's farm and meant that one half would no longer be functional. The flood-free route also has the most minimal impact on acid sulphate soils and therefore reduces associated management costs. The RTA's proposed routes are all through substantial areas of acid sulphate soils, which correlate largely with the floodplain and prime agricultural land.

I find myself in an awful predicament as a result of this RTA proposal. I am equally a conservationist and a member of this community. I have spent my life in close relationships with farmers and their families, largely as a result of my grandfather and father doing blacksmithing and welding for them). I believe the farmers also value the bush that we have and its wildlife. I can provide examples of how they have managed their land for the environment. Many of these farmers have lead the way – burning cane from native vegetation out to the road rather than burn and effectively remove the remnant; first to no-till soil, various acid sulphate soil management programs, restoration of fish breeding habitats etc. Like me, they are part of the community and we together want to leave a legacy that we can be proud of to future generations, a land that we can enjoy our wildlife and grow crops. I do not believe that one or the other has to lose out. I believe that by looking (as those with the flood-free-route) for opportunities to avoid and minimise impacts that the RTA could come up with the most-cost effective option of all.

I also believe that the loss of agricultural land, particularly prime agricultural land, and the loss of our natural and cultural heritage (discussed in Attachment 3a), should be of major concern to all Australians. We as a country must look to the future. Can we really afford to have agricultural land developed (for roads, residential, industrial etc)? What happens when that land is needed to feed our people. We cannot rely on imports! We must retain and improve the quality of our agricultural land, and that includes managing for the environment.

2 b) Any person who has experienced the major local floods in 1945, 1948, 1950, 1954 and 1974 will place a much higher level of importance on local flooding issues than someone who has never experienced these events. Additional minor flooding has been experienced in



every decade except the 1990's. These experiences should not be disregarded. So we haven't had a decent flood for almost 20 years and we haven't had a major flood for over 30 years, but when we do it will be devastating enough without having the RTA's proposal increasing the risk to many properties.

In addition, the cost to provide these routes as flood free would be enormous as a result of the fill required to achieve this. The flood-free route developed by some of the CLG members has minimised these costs.

I understand that the RTA has not spoken to the SES flood coordinator in Woodburn to get a greater reflection of flooding issues in Woodburn. They are getting limited advice for this area. It appears they are also ignoring the significance of the flood issue as raised by relevant people in the Broadwater area.

An additional benefit of the flood free route would be that Evans Head would not be isolated from the world. People will still be able to go to work, receive medical assistance and not be inconvenienced by a flood event.

2 c) I have largely addressed this matter in Attachment 3b relating to social issues and concerns. However, I will stress here that the Richmond Valley is a strong community with ties going back ages. The government has a responsibility to ensure that the value of the small community isn't lost. We don't live in the city, we don't have access to all that city-folk do. What we have is each other and the encouragement, support, friendships, and trust that go with it. It appears that the RTA, through its' development of route options, has attempted to divide each little group into fighting for its own patch. I hope the strength of the community as a whole and concern for others comes through in mine and others' submissions. I also hope that we, as a community, have been largely focussed on the issues and not personal adversity.

### *3) Other matters related to the Pacific Highway Upgrade*

In addition to the above concerns, I have briefly addressed social, economic and environmental concerns with the proposed route options in the following Attachments 3a-c.

### **ATTACHMENT 3a: ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES OF THE STUDY AREA AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WITH PROPOSED ROUTE OPTIONS**

I have reviewed the RTA's Environmental Policy from their website (signed by Chief Executive and all RTA Directors). I have attached this policy for your consideration (Attachment 1), as I believe I have demonstrated in this submission, that in the development of route options for the Woodburn to Ballina Bypass, the RTA has failed to act in accordance with its own policy.

When questioned, by a Community Liaison Group member, on the poor quality of the environmental assessment on which route option constraints were identified, the consultants for the RTA responded, with words to the effect that "environmental concerns such as threatened species and ecological communities have not been considered important because they would limit route options". That the RTA would dismiss these values for such a reason is disturbing.

This is such a significant area for biodiversity with over 100 threatened species known or likely to occur in the study area. The RTA consultants have missed the survey period for many of the threatened species known or highly likely to occur in the study area, that have specific survey requirements. Therefore, the RTA cannot determine the true nature of impacts to threatened species and their habitat and the associated mitigation and compensatory measures required and the associated costs.

This is the largest area with continuous corridors and remnants of vegetation on the Richmond Floodplain. It is identified in the Department of Environment and Conservation's Key Habitats and Corridors. As a result it contains significant areas of endangered ecological communities (Swamp Sclerophyll Forest, Coastal Subtropical Floodplain Forest, Swamp Oak Forest, Lowland Rainforest on Floodplain, Freshwater Wetland) and the habitat of numerous threatened species, plants and animals. These communities have been poorly identified and recognised by the RTA. For example, an area of my land that is clearly Swamp Oak Forest (an endangered ecological community) and is also mapped by Department of Planning as a SEPP 14 Wetland has been mapped by the RTA as "ridge sclerophyll forest". This has resulted in a diminished ecological value being allocated to the land by the RTA and an inaccurate reflection of the associated cost to mitigate. Furthermore, the RTA's assessment has poorly reflected the complexity of recreating an ecological community and the associated costs. This is not a simple measure and cannot be addressed as such.

It is almost ludicrous that while some government departments are committing large amounts of resources to studying, repairing and managing our floodplains that another department, namely the RTA, can be allowed to incur such significant impacts.

Fragmentation and isolation of these areas is likely to be catastrophic on wildlife. I have been advised by animal carers in the Tweed, that other highway upgrades have continued to have significant numbers of wildlife deaths, despite best efforts by the RTA to mitigate the impacts. I believe the Pacific Highway at Broadwater in its current status is largely responsible for the loss of the koala from the Koala Park. An appropriately designed highway around this area could prevent further koala losses as individuals move and attempt to recolonise the area.

There is recent anecdotal evidence that some new sections of Pacific Highway Upgrades have facilitated the introduction of Indian Mynahs to new areas. These are vigorous breeders and have a devastating impact on wildlife in the areas they take over. These areas do not need another introduced animal at which its removal will be at the cost of the community.

The impact of haulage of fill on the local rural roads on wildlife does not appear to have been considered. This will be catastrophic given that small temporal increases from local quarries have devastating impacts on local wildlife populations. For example, in three weeks of increased haulage (using 10 tonne trucks) three goannas, two wallabies, a bandy-bandy snake, numerous frogs, two white-headed pigeons, an echidna and a family pet were recorded as killed on Bagotville Road. Further, the additional impacts on biodiversity, of upgrading these roads to a safe standard do not appear to have been considered.

Many people in the community have been working with the government to restore the fish habitat in the Tuckean Broadwater. This is a significant habitat for fish breeding and many threatened species (eg Osprey, Black-necked Stork). Many of the proposed route options are likely to compromise these efforts, and the habitat of threatened species and ecological communities. These values have been largely disregarded as important. A social issue related to this, is that our community genuinely believes in its the efforts to restore the land and water habitats for biodiversity. The RTA's apparent attitude of disregard for these efforts has many questioning the government's commitment to implementing its environmental legislation, policies, and plans.

Furthermore, it appears the farmers in our area, whose families for generations have left vegetation on their land, will be punished for that. It seems contrary to all the current native vegetation reforms that are aimed at encouraging farmers to retain native vegetation. How on one hand can the government be asking farmers to retain native vegetation and on the other hand another arm of the government be asking farmers to just allow the native vegetation on their land to be sacrificed or that they sacrifice their agricultural land so the highway can avoid the vegetation. Some farmers have left significant amounts of vegetation in this area and should not be penalised for that. Virtually everyone who resides or owns land in our area contributes to the peaceful and beautiful place that I wish to pass onto future generations, with the same or improved environmental quality. I cannot understand how a government department can have such little regard for such an important legislated consideration, particularly when that lack of consideration is contrary to the objectives of the legislation.

Clause 228 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000* (EPAR 2000), refers to the factors that must be taken into account by a public authority concerning the impact of an activity on the environment. Assuming the RTA will be preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for this proposed bypass-upgrade, it is concerning that these factors will only be considered fully for the selected route option, rather than for the selection of a route option that genuinely addresses the RTA's responsibilities under the EPA Act. This approach certainly has the ability to bias any process and to justify, however poorly, the RTA's preferred route. However, it also means that in selecting a route option without appropriate levels of study, undetected or misrepresented environmental constraints will have to be funded. I am concerned that in selecting route options, the approach taken by the RTA limits the feasibility assessment and constraints studies in relation to Clause 228.

Section 111 of the EPA Act identifies the "duty of determining authorities to consider environmental impact of activities" and that this requires the determining authority to "examine and take into account to the fullest extent possible all matters affecting or likely to affect the environment by reason of that activity". Furthermore, the Land and Environment Court has determined in previous cases before it, that the factors under Section 112 of the EPA Act must be considered to the fullest extent possible and it is not acceptable for a public authority "to merely pay lip service to the matter". This was in relation to threatened species

and endangered ecological communities. It appears that the RTA is not undertaking its responsibilities, with due diligence nor with appropriate duty of care, as required under the EPA Act.

Furthermore, it is understood that the General Manager of Ballina Shire Council has written to the RTA regarding the quality of the environmental assessments and the lack of information upon which to base route options. It is also understood that the Department of Environment and Conservation has provided the RTA with detailed information on matters of environmental significance within the study area. It appears that the RTA is treating Ballina Shire Council and the Department of Environment and Conservation with the same level of contempt and disrespect as it is the broader community.

Additional environmental concerns are intrinsically connected to my economic and social concerns. Therefore, these concerns are addressed in the Attachments below.

### **ATTACHMENT 3b: SOCIAL VALUES OF THE STUDY AREA AND SOCIAL ISSUES WITH PROPOSED ROUTE OPTIONS**

This section addresses the social impacts of the proposal, its effect on people, their way of life, their community and cultural traditions. As I understand the assessment of potential social impacts is an integral part of thorough environmental impact assessment as required under the EPA Act. I am concerned that in their development of route options, the RTA has been and is dismissive of the above-mentioned social impacts.

The State Government's social justice strategy recognises and promotes individual rights and providing better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting people's lives. I am concerned, as a result of the RTA's dismissive attitude describing our social concerns as "par for the course", that the assessment of social impacts in their studies will receive poor coverage, little more than lip service, by the RTA. It is for this reason, I urge you to consider the social impacts fully and to do whatever in your power as a committee member of this Inquiry to ensure that social impacts are fully considered and compensated for.

Some of the social impacts that I believe must be given due recognition by the Standing Committee and not considered trivial, as appears the RTA have, include:

#### *Disadvantages to communities and individuals*

The disadvantages to communities and individuals is too numerous to list. Some examples are provided.

There are route options that go straight over the top of several houses and this is not necessary. Routes could have been developed that avoid people's houses. This is causing concern, not only for those people, but for the remainder of the community. No-one wants anyone to be forced to sacrifice their home or their way of life for this perceived necessity. I say perceived necessity because the real issues with safety on the Pacific Highway are fatigue, the complacency that goes with good roads, inexperience, the speeds people drive on good roads, the number of trucks (especially double-B's) and the number of truck driver's extending reasonable travelling time and the use of drugs to achieve this. Get the trucks back on the New England Highway immediately. Plan for quality rail infrastructure. Just don't take anyone's home.

All of the proposed routes will cause significant disadvantage to our community, including to the viability of numerous agricultural properties, as well as to individual properties, and the Aboriginal community. I believe the RTA has selectively considered the heritage of our area. For example, one section of route was designed to allegedly avoid an old brickworks. It is just funny that a brickworks never existed on the site. Yet at the same time other sites that have significant historic sites and cultural links with the Aboriginal community appear to have been ignored.

The agricultural industry is as much a part of our community as the natural and cultural heritage, as much as bush fires, floods, our lifestyles and sense of community. The irreplaceable loss of the complex rural landscape will disadvantage the community in the Richmond Catchment as a whole, and many individuals within it. I want to have a say and do not believe the RTA will listen. They have denied us fair consultation. Without adequate information I am concerned that the community, through its submissions, could lead the RTA to make decisions with different impacts in different areas, but none-the-less still have significant and unacceptable social impacts.

People who currently live in serene and tranquil environments will no longer. The noise and pollution from haulage trucks in the construction phases will be intolerable and are likely to operate extended hours (possibly 24 hours 7 days a week), increased by the sound of "Double-B's" (and potential "Triple-Trailer trucks") after construction. This is an unacceptable and unnecessary impost and is not fair in the name of progress. I grew up in Broadwater on the Pacific Highway. It was always difficult to sleep at night. Since then I have always lived away from main roads. I chose to purchase my house in an area close to "home" and my friends but away from the noise of traffic and the Sugar Mill. To have wildlife as my background noise I had to pay substantially more for my property than I would have if I'd chose to live and buy in Broadwater. I am concerned that both the peace and quiet that I paid to seek out will be compromised by the close proximity of some route options. Many people in the west paid more for their properties and it was a lifestyle choice. The by-pass will already increase the value of homes in Broadwater etc, but it shouldn't be at the expense of others.

It appears that the towns will be isolated from each other eg community of Riley's Hill will be isolated from the township of Broadwater, the town that provides local support to community of Riley's Hill, eg postal services, fuel, supplies, mechanic etc. If the RTA put underpasses for through traffic then these costs must be factors into the feasibility assessment of those route options.

The old Bagotville Ferry crossing is a special memory to those who use it and the subsequent changes to the area following the construction of the Bagotville Barrage. Is an extensive bridge a satisfactory monument to this part of our history. It was used by the Aboriginal community, which was placed on Cabbage Tree Island by the authorities. Many of these options go through Bundjalung land, a culture already heavily impacted since European settlement, and in doing so further fragment the remaining threads of the Bundjalung people. The RTA appear to be ignoring the importance of the connection to special areas that remaining Bundjalung people have.

#### *Effects on health, safety, welfare and amenity*

Most people who live in this area do so because of the amenity it provides. Some people moved to this area to avoid the noise and pollution they experienced elsewhere. We all have something beautiful and special to look at. No-one wants to look at a 4-6 lane highway where before existed the complex of our rural landscape. It is a lifestyle choice to live here and to have the RTA disregard issues as suits their purposes is not considered as appropriate duty of care.

The haulage trucks will be a safety issue on the local rural roads. Many of these roads are currently unsuitable for the speed limits and some traffic usage. The community's safety should not be placed at risk in the name of progress nor should our environment be compromised for safety reasons (work that would not be necessary except for the RTA's route options).

Several studies have found that increased traffic noise can have serious health implications, including lack of or disturbed sleep, deterioration of mental health and increased levels of stress. These factors have been found to contribute to family breakdown. These are issues that our peaceful community should not be asked to endure.

#### *Economic factors, specifically net economic welfare, direct costs to the community or individuals, decrease in economic stability, and changes to public sector finances*

Economic factors, specifically net economic welfare, direct costs to the community or individuals, decrease in economic stability in our community are all of concern.

Another major concern to the community is the abuse of public sector finances. I have always heard that the RTA has more money than it knows what to do with. This community is fast finding out how much money. It is of concern that poor quality and blatantly incorrect data is provided for the Community Liaison Group to consider in their assessment of constraints. The true cost of each route has not been evaluated by the RTA, nor have they time or adequate consultation to evaluate the costs. It appears that selective cost issues have been inconsistently applied to different route options, and it appears that inconsistent arguments between this and other highway upgrades have also been used by the RTA as excuses to avoid areas. For example, in some areas flood issues are important reasons for selecting a particular route and in other areas it is considered as a minor constraint.

In relation to the above example, the costs associated with having a road within the 1 in 20 year flood level will be significant and is irresponsible on the part of the RTA. If there are ways to have a road outside the 1 in 100 year flood level and minimise impacts to the agricultural industry and natural and cultural heritage, surely further investigation is warranted. Perhaps this further justifies the proposal to have an inland highway to deal the through traffic.

#### *Heritage, cultural and aesthetic impacts*

The Aboriginal Heritage and Culture of the Bundjalung people is dying out. It is really important to preserve and conserve what is left of this part of everyone's history. This includes the importance of areas near Cabbage Tree Island that were used to continue cultural traditions, such as gathering. Just because there are no visible or tangible Aboriginal sites does not mean that the area itself is not significant to the Bundjalung people.

As discussed in above points the aesthetic beauty of this area is about to be destroyed. There are too many special and beautiful places that will be affected by these proposed route options to list here. I urge you to come and see for yourself the legacy that we can leave to future generations, or imagine the legacy the RTA could leave. I know which one I have more faith in.

#### *Land use impacts*

Many of the route options will significantly affect the viability of several to numerous agricultural properties. Cutting properties in half or reducing their size significantly is likely to result in the loss of agricultural land to other purposes. As stated previously, agriculture is a part of the community complex of the Richmond Floodplain.

The Tuckean Broadwater is a special and important place and all efforts must be made to avoid this area. Some routes options would prevent recreational activities, such as canoeing, fishing and bird watching in the Tuckean Broadwater, from being peaceful and relaxing experiences. Bird watching in these areas is well recognised. I am worried that the magic of seeing Brolgas dancing, Black-necked Storks feeding, Comb-crested Jacanas running on lily pads, Black Swans and their cygnets will all be sightings of the past.

#### *Transportation impacts*

Numerous issues, including the small roads that would need to be used, or upgrade for haulage of fill. These upgrades would be substantial, in area and cost.

As discussed briefly above, noise, safety, and road kills etc, are all issues that appear to have been cited as able to be mitigated by the RTA. Ask any resident on a new section of highway upgrade that now passes their previously serene place, how well the RTA manages noise, and their subsequent noise-related complaints.

Much of our area, outside those houses directly on the existing Pacific Highway, does not have any traffic noise for the majority each day, and some properties do not even hear traffic or the existing highway. These areas contain wildlife and beauty unrivalled elsewhere on the Richmond Floodplain. A four to six lane highway through these areas is absolutely incomprehensible.

The office of the Commission of Inquiry for Environment and Planning has identified that social impacts and considerations are a significant issue that requires greater attention if major projects are to gain widespread acceptance. It also suggests that a further matter that requires analysis is that of communities and residents located immediately outside of areas for which compensation arrangements apply. The RTA appear to have a limited scope to offer limited compensation and certainly will not be compensating people seriously affected by these proposed route options. In particular, are flooding issues throughout the study area, noise, loss of amenity and reduced land prices. I hope for a fairer consideration of impacts to our lives through this Parliamentary Inquiry.



### **ATTACHMENT 3c: ECONOMIC VALUES OF THE STUDY AREA AND ECONOMIC ISSUES WITH PROPOSED ROUTE OPTIONS**

I am concerned at the wastage of public money that has been spent on flawed studies, such as the assessments referred to above. The community has provided a more complete data set to the RTA through the Community Liaison Group and the RTA has not had the decency to either acknowledge or utilise this data and information.

Many of the Community Liaison Group members have contributed large amounts of their time voluntarily, not only in attending meetings, but reviewing copious amounts of complex information, liaising with the community, researching information and preparing for meetings. They have spent 100's of hours each. The efforts and knowledge of these members appears to have been poorly recognised by the RTA, as demonstrated by their dismissal of these contributions. The personal costs (in time and travel) and the stress of not being able to really represent their community and be the link to the community are additional economic and social costs. This is not acceptable from a government department, no matter what the department's pressure's are.

Many of these proposed route options are likely to render affected agriculture properties in this area (cane, grazing cattle, and goats) inviable. The economic and social impacts to losing the agricultural component of our community cannot be ignored by the RTA.

The acid sulphate soil issues in the study area have been trivialised. The "jelly-like" mud that is 30-40 metres deep through mangrove areas are considered as "par for the course" by the RTA. The location of the proposed bridge crossings are often on sharp corners where the river washes the bank away. Are these really ideal places to put a bridge? The cost associated with having two bridges and needing to stabilise jelly mud must negate these as viable options.

The effect of climate change, a real issue on the North Coast, has been dismissed as something the RTA is not concerned with. This is despite a community member reporting on a CSIRO study, a study from our country's leading scientific research organisation. This same person mentioned the salt water from the ocean washing out roads to illustrate the point. The consultants response three times was "I don't think you mean washing away". This older man had to become quite firm to ensure his point was both heard and understood. Michael Costa (ex-Minister for Roads) says in Hansard that the local community aren't experts and that he will listen to the experts, the RTA. Well I say that the local community, collectively, has more to contribute and could write the plans for less than the RTA is paying its consultants, with a far better outcome for the entire community. In fact I believe it has been done by this community.

The costs associated with mitigating the environmental impacts are considered to have been inadequately addressed by the RTA's consultants. For example, the destruction of endangered ecological communities has been identified as trivial to mitigate. Not even the Western Australian mining companies, at the forefront of recreating ecological communities, would consider it a trivial or simple task, and certainly not cost efficient. In many areas under the proposed route options, endangered ecological communities are not recognised as such. Therefore, the true economic cost of a many proposed routes is flawed and cannot be fairly considered against other route options in terms of cost. Furthermore, areas of endangered ecological communities on the floodplain, including areas of SEPP 14 wetland, were mapped as ridge sclerophyll vegetation. This was the information used to design route options.

As mentioned above, large amounts of State and Federal government funding, and volunteer time from Tuckean Landcare, has been provided to remediate fish breeding areas and acid sulphate soils in the Broadwater-Tuckean Swamp area. This proposal is likely to compromise those efforts and is virtually throwing away the money spent thus far.