Submission
No 4

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

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Date Received: 24/06/2005

Subject:

Summary

14/6/05

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades
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Pacific Highway Upgrade NSW

Woodburn to Ballina Route options

The Pacific Highway in NSW is a major route for many travellers from Sydney to Brisbane as well as from other regions and is an important regional road throughout the many towns that it passes. The coast of NSW has the greatest population of people compared to inland areas. For these reasons it is of common consensus to the people living on the coast that the Pacific Highway should not be used as a major motorway for the benefit of carrying freight interstate. It is highly dangerous to mix freight with cars as this results in road carnage. I have attended many public meetings regarding the Pacific Highway upgrade and read the local papers as well. The residents of the north coast are dissatisfied that B doubles have been allowed on the Pacific Highway and have witnessed the deleterious effects of this through the many accidents that have occurred as well as the increased road noise. Residents are fed up with being intimidated by trucks tailgating at dangerous speeds and avoid the use of the highway at night due to the increased numbers of trucks (of increased size) using the highway. The safety and concerns of the residents of the north coast have not been considered and have been ignored. It appears that an overhaul of the trucking industry is long overdue (for the truckers themselves along with the freight system). It seems that the government is not keeping pace with population growth and is considering a band-aid approach by turning the Pacific Highway into a motorway for the benefit of freight traffic.

The aims of the Pacific Highway Upgrading Program are "improvements to road conditions, safety and travel times". With the increased amount of freight traffic since the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah Section, safety has been poorly overlooked. Better roads always result in increased traffic as these roads are travelled by opportunistic drivers. The New England Highway is the federally funded route for interstate traffic and is better suited for this purpose. Faster travel time on the Pacific Highway is not always better as it involves a dangerous mix with car and truck travel. An even better system would be to upgrade the rail system particularly with the 'road railer system' used in the

United States whereby trailers can be loaded at warehouses, driven by road to a railway depot, connected up to a railway bogie and transported by rail to other depots along the rail line. A transport company can then pick up the trailer and deliver goods locally by road. A video of this system has been forwarded to the Member for Ballina, Don Page by Ken Silva (a former interstate truck driver). A road railer system is also more environmentally sound than a system wholly reliant upon fuel for transport. Many carriages can be carried on one train compared to the many trucks that are needed to move this load. It is a system that could be built upon to meet the demands of the future as a rail network already exists.

It is of no doubt that the Pacific Highway does need upgrading and that traffic is increasing due to increasing population overall. The environmental effects of population growth on the NSW North Coast have been very damaging to date. It seems that environmental effects have not been taken into account regarding some of the proposed route options for the new Pacific Highway in the Woodburn to Ballina Section. The least damaging highway upgrade would be near the existing path of the highway and be redirected around small towns such as Wardell, Broadwater and Woodburn. The increased amount of traffic (particularly the semi trailers and B doubles) that pass through these small towns is a physical and environmental risk to the residents themselves. Option 2F (or a modified option along this route) is the least disturbing to residents of this area and of least environmental impact.

Options 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D cross areas of high value habitat and wetlands and should not be considered. I would like to present a case of why 2A and 2B in particular should not be considered with particular reference to the Tuckean Broadwater.

Tuckean Swamp is an area of coastal floodplain of approximately 5000 hectares on the lower Richmond River near Broadwater in Northern New South Wales. It was once an important fisheries habitat and a major feeding and nesting ground for large populations of waterbirds. It was also a wetland of regional significance and an important resource to indigenous people.

The nature and characteristics of the Tuckean Swamp have been changed since European Settlement through clearing and drainage for agriculture. Drainage and flood mitigation works were constructed to improve the potential productivity of the land. The Bagotville barrage was completed in the late 1960's. This structure was provided to protect the swamp from inundation by mainstream river flooding. Saline tidal flows into the swamp are also inhibited by the barrage and vehicle access across the Broadwater was provided.

Since the 1980's land and water management problems within the Tuckean Swamp became evident. These problems included; runoff from acid sulfate soils, poor water quality, land degradation, reduced agricultural productivity, loss of estuarine fisheries habitat (a major fish kill occurred in 1993) and degraded native vegetation and wildlife values. As a result of these concerns, the Tuckean Swamp Management Committee was formed in 1993 to develop a Land and Water Management Plan in order to improve the value of the

Tuckean Swamp. Key management aims included mitigating the onsite impacts of acid on water quality, agricultural productivity and aquatic terrestrial flora and fauna; reducing the production of acid sulfate soils by addressing the process of oxidation and mitigating the downstream impacts of oxidation products on water quality and aquatic ecosystems. (Baldwin, 1996). In a study of aquatic flora and fauna of the Tuckean floodplain Cawley (1995) found that the incidence of acid sulfate soils had a significant effect on aquatic faunal communities and although the distribution and abundance patterns can be associated with many different factors, pH had the greatest impact on these patterns. The Tuckean Broadwater is at a slow stage of recovery due to management actions proposed by the Tuckean Swamp Management Committee. By disturbing the acid sulfate soil through roadworks and affecting water flow once again in the Broadwater area particularly with bridge building on proposed routes 2A and 2B; this would once again present the environmental, agricultural and fisheries problems listed above. Road works on proposed routes 2A and 2B may also have an increased affect on local flooding and flooding upstream.

The proposed bridges of 2A and 2B cross mangrove habitat. The destruction of mangrove habitat results in loss of the mangrove ecosystem including the organisms that rely on it. This may have large effects of the biological, chemical, physical, economic and social characteristics of this region. Loss of mangrove habitats reduce the amount of primary input into the detritus food chain and reduce the nursery grounds for commercial and recreational fish, crab and prawn species. The health of the Tuckean Broadwater mangrove ecosystem is also important to the recreational and commercial fishing industry of Ballina. Protection of mangrove habitats is provided by the State Environmental Planning Policy No. 14 (Coastal Wetlands) (SEPP 14).

At present the Tuckean Broadwater is an estuary which provides a feeding area for a number of migratory birds listed under JAMBA (Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement) and CAMBA (China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement). The Broadwater also supports large numbers of waterfowl, pacific black duck, grey teal and black swans and significant numbers of ibis, egrets and pelicans. Other habitat conservation requirements include the protection of active nests of the whistling kite, brown goshawk, brown falcon, white-bellied sea eagle and osprey (Charley and Sharpe, 1995). Many other birds and wildlife can be observed whilst walking along the levee bank on the Broadwater at and near the proposed bridge crossings including, flying foxes, whip-birds, honeyeaters and wallabies.

The Blackwall Range (abutting proposed route 2A and 2B) supports a large area of eucalypt forest as well as patches of rainforest in the gullies with diverse and abundant fauna including Albert's Lyrebird and the rose crowned fruit dove. The range also supports significant populations of gliders, possums, pademelons and wallabies. There are many records of breeding female koalas which are under threat from expanding urban development (Charley and Sharpe, 1995). West of Wardell (Proposed Routes 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D) contains a range of large and significant habitat types, which together support a large number of threatened fauna species. Vacant Crown Land

between Pine Street and Carlisle Street in Wardell is protected under Ballina LEP zoning 7(l) Environmental Protection – Habitat. The areas surrounding Wardell fulfil the roles of habitat corridor and refuge area for migratory species demonstrated by the species present and the regional distribution of habitat types. Flora and fauna studies have been undertaken by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Ballina Shire Council and by private consultants in relation to development applications (Scott, 2002). The building a motorway between the significant habitat areas of the Blackwall range and the significant habitat areas of Wardell would reduce the habitat of, destroy a movement corridor and effectively isolate breeding populations of wildlife to the extent that it may result in reduced numbers or extinction of existing species.

The southernmost bridge on section 2A crosses near an area that is a very popular recreationally for boating and fishing. This would greatly affect the amenity value of the river.

As you have probably guessed, I live close to proposed route options 2A and 2B. My family and I live at West Broadwater. We chose to buy 2ha here as we thought the place was beautiful and it was particularly 'natural' compared to many areas within the Lismore, Ballina and Richmond River Shire. Our property remains within one of the last remaining natural areas of the region. The hill we are on (south of the Blackwall range) is densely forested as is the Blackwall range. We have a variety of wildlife and have endeavoured to maintain the natural integrity of our 2ha since we moved here. Within a few years of moving here Lismore Council assessed our property as a natural heritage area. We also bought this property because it is very quiet and we cannot see any neighbours' house or road from our house. It is private and peaceful. We live approximately 2km from the existing highway (as the crow flies) and at night (if we are on our eastern verandah) we can hear the distant sounds of the trucks on the highway as the sound travels over the Broadwater. We can only imagine how much louder and how amplified the sound of a motorway over a bridge would be close to our house if the proposed routes 2A or 2B eventuate. This would not only affect us greatly, but also our neighbours and all the surrounding wildlife that we see and hear as well that are already very limited in habitat. Other effects include increased pollution from cars, visual pollution and of course, decreased land values.

A new highway on route 2A,2B, 2C or 2D would have no benefit to us at all personally and would greatly impact on the environment. The attraction of the north coast for many people is its natural beauty and heritage and the quiet areas for recreation and amenity. Greater evidence of planning is necessary to maintain the integrity of the north coast of NSW, and long term environmental and community effects must be taken into account.

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BROADWATER

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Broadwater

BROADWATER

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