



03 October 2006

Project	Pacific Highway Upgrade - Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing		From	Nicole Martyres
Subject	Ecological Focus Group (EFG) Meeting No 3		Tel	02 9239 7251
Venue/Date/Time	Yarrawarra Large Conference Centre, Red Rock, 13 September 2006, 7pm - 9pm		Job No	21/13306
Copies to	All EFG members			
Attendees	Gary Leonard Peter Birch Kelly Roche Peter Smith Stephen Williamson Scott Lawrence John Rayment Simon Pearce Nicole Martyres	(Coffs Harbour City Council) (Clarence Valley Council) (Department of Environment & Conservation) (National Parks Advisory Committee) (RTA) (RTA) (GHD) (GHD) (GHD)	Apologies	Ron Smith (Ulitarra Conservation Society) Max Enklaar (Department of Primary Industries) Kyra Ensbey (WIRES)

Item No.	Minutes	Action By	When
1	Welcome & introductions		
1.1	Nicole introduced John Rayment as the new GHD Project Manager.		
1.2	Preferred routes for the following three projects were announced on 30 August 2006: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing ▶ Oxley Highway to Kempsey ▶ F3 to Raymond Terrace 		
1.3	The State and Federal Governments have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), committing to identify ways to fund the upgrade of the Pacific Highway over the next 10 years. The RTA is waiting to hear the outcome of those discussions.		
1.4	Nicole provided an overview of the consultation associated with the preferred route announcement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Advertisements; ▶ Radio coverage; ▶ Website updated; 		



Item No.	Minutes	Action By	When
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Calls to potentially directly affected property owners to notify them that the preferred route had been announced and that they were potentially affected;▶ Calls to CLG and EFG members to notify them that the preferred route had been announced;▶ Letters, with community updates, mailed to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Potentially directly affected property owners– Property owners who are adjacent to the preferred route– Property owners who are no longer impacted– CLG & EFG members– Agencies▶ Community updates were distributed to all properties within the study area and all those who registered to be on the project mailing list;▶ Displays (static and staffed), as detailed in the community update; and▶ Meetings with potentially directly affected property owners.		
2	Preferred route corridor review		
2.1	The corridor is typically 150m wide. The lines on the map do not indicate property acquisition boundaries. The corridor shown is a starting point. The highway will be located somewhere within the corridor. It will be used to develop the footprint of the upgraded highway.		
2.2	The preferred route comprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Section A: Common corridor<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing project now starts at Arrawarra Beach Road.– The interchange, which will be located in the vicinity of Arrawarra Beach Road, will be built as part of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga project.– Essentially a duplication of the highway to the west.▶ Section B: Orange/refined orange option.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The corridor is wider in this section as the highway could be moved further west, which would improve the alignment. This section of the corridor wider and has gone back out to the community for comment as the refined orange was not displayed at the route options stage.▶ Section C: Orange/refined orange option.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Some strip acquisition.		



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– No impact on the blueberry farm packing shed.– The corridor is wider in this section as the highway could be moved further west, which would improve the alignment. This section of the corridor and has gone back out to the community for comment as the refined orange was not displayed at the route options stage.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Section D: Common corridor<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Essentially a duplication of the existing highway.▶ Section E: Combined blue and orange options<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Mainly a duplication of the existing highway, but there is a wider area around Kungala Road because there are a number of residences and businesses, two Aboriginal owned lands and a potential Aboriginal site. The RTA is trying to fit the road in around those constraints. Beyond this point, it is a duplication of the existing highway (as close as possible to the existing alignment) to the end of the project.– Planning for two new carriageways, but only one would be built in the first instance. The two new carriageways would be as close as possible to the existing highway.– At the end of this section, the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing project ties into the Wells Crossing to Iluka project.		

2.3 Overview of studies undertaken

During the route options, the project team prepared preliminary reports, which were primarily desktop studies to identify constraints and opportunities. Four options went on public display. The team went away and did some further work on sections B & C. The data collected has been used in the route selection process and these details were made available at the preferred route stage as supplementary reports in the working papers. We have mapped vegetation communities, likely endangered ecological communities, flora and fauna habitats and recorded any opportunistic sightings of threatened flora or fauna.

3 Environmental characteristics of the preferred route corridor

3.1 Section A

- ▶ Involves approximately 30 hectares of clearing from Wedding Bells State Forest and small portions of land on eastern side.
- ▶ There are SEPP 14 wetlands near Corindi Beach and Arrawarra Creek, located downstream of the proposed alignment.
- ▶ There is potential habitat for Pygmy Perch.



Item No.	Minutes	Action By	When
3.2	<p>Q. How much SEPP 14 wetlands will be affected?</p> <p>A. There will be no direct land take.</p>		
3.3	<p>Q. Where it the Pygmy Perch found?</p> <p>A. In Arrawarra Creek.</p>		
3.4	<p>Section B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">There is riparian vegetation in the southern half of this section.Involves approximately 30-40 hectares of vegetation clearing, which includes approximately 20 hectares of endangered ecological community at the northern end of the section. This is however based on a footprint of 100m and the land take could be more or less than this.The preferred route crosses some subregional wildlife corridors through this section.		
3.5	<p>Q. The route seems to take out a lot more country and cause a lot more fragmentation?</p> <p>A. We looked at ecological and environmental impacts in the Value Management Workshop. The western alignment [refined orange] does involve more vegetation clearance than the eastern alignment [orange option], 40 hectares as opposed to 30 hectares and yes it does cause more fragmentation.</p>		
3.6	<p>Q. Is it a better alignment [refined orange option]?</p> <p>A. It is ½ km shorter, but about the same cost to construct. Many of the property owners in this area would prefer it to go further to the west so that it passes to the back of their properties and does not take their houses.</p>		
3.7	<p>Q. Is it good in terms of construction?</p> <p>A. The refined orange option improves the flood immunity. We have to raise the highway in all cases to approximately 2-2.5m above the floodplain. However the refined orange option has the advantage of being located higher upstream in the floodplain. The soft soils are not severe in this area, which makes it good for construction.</p>		
3.8	<p>Q. What mitigation measures are proposed for wildlife corridors?</p> <p>A. As part of the next stage of detailed ecological investigations we need to work out appropriate locations and types of wildlife crossings. Fisheries have mapped the Pygmy Perch habitat. All options cross this area, so fish passage was not a differentiator.</p>		



Item No.	Minutes	Action By	When
3.9	Section C		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Dirty Creek Range is heavily vegetated. There is good quality habitat on the west (less disturbed).<li>▶ The eastern option [orange option] involves approximately 30 hectares of vegetation clearance, whereas the western option [refined orange option] involves approximately 47 hectares of clearance. Above the floodplain, there is only approximately 1 hectare of Endangered Ecological Community.<li>▶ The proposal involves joining up the Old Pacific Highway to form a service road, so there will be some clearance associated with this.		
3.10	Q. So will people in Corindi have to go south to the interchange?		
	A. In a Class A scenario, there will be an at grade intersection at Range Road. It is likely that a Class A will be developed in the first instance as there is low traffic on this section, however the RTA are planning for land take to accommodate a Class M. The RTA is planning to rationalise access on to the highway. The service road strategy will be developed during the concept design. For example, in Wells Crossing, access may be in the form of a service road that runs along the back of a number of properties. This service road would then feed onto the highway, which should improve safety.		
3.11	Section E		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ The highway has to cross the Halfway Creek floodplain.<li>▶ At this stage, it looks like the route will take the western alignment, because there is Aboriginal owned land and a potential Aboriginal site to the east. Therefore it is likely to impact on the service station.<li>▶ In terms of riparian vegetation, there are freshwater species.<li>▶ The option intrudes into Wells Crossing Flora Reserve, which is state forest estate (class 1 vegetation, zoned for conservation purposes).<li>▶ Involves approximately 90 hectares of vegetation clearing.		
3.12	Q. What is the justification for going to the west of the highway at Wells Crossing Flora Reserve?		
	A. It maximises re-use of the existing highway, and reduces private property acquisition and noise impacts.		



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3.13	<p>Q. Did you manage to obtain information from State Forests on species in that area?</p> <p>A. Yes we did get some but it is very old. There has been no further detailed investigation to date. Further investigations will be carried out in the next stage. .</p>		
4	Questions		
4.1	<p>Q. Has it been determined whether an EIS is required?</p> <p>A. Yes. The RTA expect to go though Part 3A of the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act</i> to seek approval for the project.</p>		
4.2	<p>Q. If Council is approached for information during the exhibition process, is the RTA able to do a briefing for Council staff?</p> <p>A. Yes. The General Manager of the RTA's Pacific Highway Office rang the mayors of Clarence Valley Council and Coffs Harbour City Council on the day of the announcement to inform that the preferred route had been announced. The RTA was going to do a presentation to Clarence Valley Council on the Monday, but it was cancelled.</p>		
4.3	<p>Q. What process is there to sort out the route in the wider areas?</p> <p>A. The project team, GHD and the RTA, will participate in a small workshop to evaluate the routes in these sections.</p>		
4.4	<p>Q. Has the community got enough information [on the wider areas]? How can they be properly considered?</p> <p>A. The RTA is not doing any more survey work that will inform where the highway will go in these areas. The information provided in the working papers provides a comparison of the east [orange option] and west [refined orange option] routes.</p>		
4.5	<p>Q. Are you going to do a landscape function assessment [assessment of the ecological function of the landscape]?</p> <p>A. Yes, it is likely be a requirement of the Minister for Planning.</p> <p>A landscape function assessment involves looking at all aspects and seeing if together they will generate a change at the landscape scale, e.g. if there is a change in hydrology, it could impact on the wetland areas. You would need to look at vegetation productivity, hydrology of wetlands and the Solitary Islands Marine Park, wildlife corridors etc. Via this assessment you have a better ability to develop mitigation measures.</p>		



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4.6	<p>Q. What sort of offsets can the RTA offer?</p> <p>A. In the route selection process, the RTA tried to minimise the impacts, e.g. the amount of clearing. If clearance of sensitive areas, for example areas of high conservation value habitat, cannot be avoided then the RTA would need to negotiate with the Department of Environment & Conservation (DEC) over provision of compensatory habitat. It may be that the RTA buys an area of ecological value and hands this over under the care and management of DEC. This could be a condition of approval or negotiated prior to approval. The land purchase may not necessarily be at a project level. It may be that an area of land is acquired outside of the project area that serves to provide compensatory habitat for a number of projects.</p>		
5	Feedback from the community		
5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ People want the interchange to be as near to Corindi Beach as possible.▶ Coffs Harbour City Council has supplied ground truthing data (mapping) to GHD and if there is any adjustment, they will pass this on.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The original surveys (2005 mapping by Coffs Harbour City Council) over-exaggerated the cover.– <i>Melichrus hirsutus</i> was previously identified in the area. It looks like it does not occur in the area, although it is thought to occur nearby.▶ There have been some letters to the newspapers and news on the Pacific Highway Alliance.▶ The new service station at Halfway Creek is extracting groundwater for their use (they have their own freshwater supply).		
6	Next stages in the process		
6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ The preferred route is currently on display. The closing date for submissions is 13 October 2006.▶ We are currently:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– meeting with potentially affected property owners. The issues raised in these discussions will be considered during development of the concept design.– Conducting field investigations, including ecological surveys, Aboriginal surveys, geotechnical surveys▶ There will be a full ecological survey of the entire preferred route corridor in accordance with DEC and RTA guidelines. This includes threatened species searches, trapping, spotlighting, reconfirmation of vegetation boundaries and the location of endangered ecological communities.		



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The concept design for the highway is likely to go on display in early to mid 2007. ▶ After the concept design is finalised, the RTA will work out property boundaries and write to all property owners to advise them whether they are or are not impacted by the upgrade. 		
7	Actions from last meeting		
7.1	▶ <i>NM to circulate list of reports to all CLG and EFG members</i> – The list was circulated to all CLG and EFG members.		
7.2	▶ <i>Stephen to make enquiries about arranging attendance of specialist ecological consultants at the next meeting to provide an outline of the studies undertaken, the scope of works and fieldwork</i> – We were hoping to be able to have Ecotone and HWR here at this meeting, however they were unable to come along as they had other commitments.		
7.3	▶ <i>Nicole to prepare and circulate EFG member contact list</i> – The contact list was prepared and circulated to all EFG members.		
8	Summary and Close		
8.1	<p>This is the third and final meeting of the EFG, however there are other opportunities for EFG members to be involved in subsequent stages of the project.</p> <p>The RTA asked CLG members whether they wanted to change the format of the CLG, however they indicated that are happy with the current process and want to continue.</p> <p>The RTA could hold workshops in the future on specific topics of interest, for example, access. EFG members are welcome to come along to any of those workshops/meetings.</p>		
8.2	<p><i>Stephen asked EFG members for feedback – if they felt that the EFG was a worthwhile exercise and whether people have benefited from their involvement.</i></p> <p>There was too big a gap between meetings. This meeting should have happened earlier, but other than that it has been useful and valuable.</p> <p>Stephen commented that unfortunately we could not have had the meeting earlier as we had to wait for the preferred route to be announced. The timing of the announcement was beyond the RTA's control. He also added that this project was fortunate, as because of the short length and that fact that the options looked at ribbon development (i.e. were closely aligned and did not include major deviations to the existing highway), the project team were able to do habitat mapping and walk the sites.</p>		



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8.3	Nicole thanked everyone for their input over the last three meetings and taking the time to attend meetings. Nicole encouraged EFG members to contact the project information line (1800 154 724) if they had any queries or wanted to provide further information after this meeting.		

Nicole Martyres

Community Liaison Representative, Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing