



06 October 2005

Project	Pacific Highway Upgrade - Oxley Highway to Kempsey		From	Shaun Taylor
Subject	Ecological Focus Group (EFG) Meeting No. 1		Tel	4979 9999
Venue/Date/Time	22 September 2005		Job No	22/12057/24
Copies to	All attendees and Greg Davey, Cliff Toms			
Attendees	Dr Vanessa Standing (VS)	Koala Preservation Society of NSW Inc.	Apologies	Greg Davey DPI (Fisheries)
	Chris Rowland (CR)	Koala Preservation Society of NSW Inc.		Cliff Toms (Port Macquarie-Hastings Council)
	Andrew Hugget (AH)	DEC		
	John Gorham (JG)	FAWNA		
	John Jeayes (JJ)	North Coast Environment Council		
	Matt Potter (MP)	Department of Primary Industries (Forests NSW)		
	David Whitfield (DW)	Hastings Birdwatchers		
	Tony Blue (TB)	Kempsey Shire Council		
	Stephen Williamson (SW)	RTA		
	Christophe Steinbach (CS)	RTA		
	Scott Lawrence (SL)	RTA		
	Simon Pearce (SP)	GHD		
	Shaun Taylor (ST)	GHD		
	Melanie Miels (MM)	GHD		

Item No.	Minutes	Action By	When
1	Introduction		
1.1	Welcome and introductions.		
2	Ground Rules		
2.1	The following ground rules for EFG meetings were agreed to by the EFG:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Observe common courtesy; ▶ Listen to each other; ▶ Strive to understand other people's point of view; ▶ Don't talk over each other; ▶ Share airtime equally; ▶ Be honest; ▶ Wait until the appropriate time to share your thoughts and ideas; ▶ Be prepared to discuss the reasons for your views; 		



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Wait until questions time;▶ Keep to the facts;▶ Keep to the time and breaks; and▶ Switch off or turn down phones.		
3	Project Overview		
3.1	<p>Stephen Williamson provided an overview of the project, including a discussion about the CLG representatives, the route option development, and where the project is up to.</p> <p>Stephen advised that they were in the process of finalising route options and the options will hopefully go on exhibition within a couple of months.</p>		
3.2	<p>Route option display.</p> <p>The EFG was advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ The route options display will run for up to 4 weeks;▶ There will be static displays (staffed and unstaffed) throughout the display period;▶ Information will also be placed at various locations along the study area; and▶ Information including the display panels and the Route Options Development Report (RODR) will be available at the staffed displays.		
3.3	<p>A copy of the RODR will be sent to each of the EFG representatives.</p>		
3.4	<p>The route options will appear on an aerial photograph image. Each option will represent a 250 metre wide corridor. It should be noted that it is purely a corridor and if one of the options is selected as the preferred route, the project team will look more closely at constraints within the 250 metre corridor in refining the preferred route.</p>		
3.5	<p>Melanie will phone all EFG members on the day of the announcement, to advise the start of the display period.</p>		



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4	Role of the EFG		
4.1	<i>Attendees were given a copy of the Charter to read, before they were asked to sign it.</i>		
4.2	<p>It was stated that the EFG would meet three times. These were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Current meeting;2. During the route options display period; and3. During the preferred route option stage. <p>If there is anything in Charter you don't agree with, please raise with RTA/GHD.</p> <p>Q. If you cannot attend an EFG meeting are you allowed to send a replacement.</p> <p>A. Yes, EFG members are allowed to send a replacement if they are unable to attend. It was highlighted to the EFG representatives that they should attend as many meetings as possible, as they represent environment groups within the community, and to ensure consistency.</p> <p>EFG members agreed that if they are unable to attend an EFG meeting they should contact Melanie Miels (1800 154 724) or Stephen Williamson (0409 441 018).</p> <p><i>The Charter was accepted and signed by the EFG.</i></p>		
4.3	<p>It was agreed that two-way communication was critical to the success of the EFG.</p> <p>It was agreed that the EFG would also direct interested stakeholders to the 1800 number.</p> <p>JJ is also a member of the CLG, and will provide 2-way communication between the CLG and EFG. Anything important arising from either group can be raised.</p>		
4.4	<p>The EFG recognised the importance of not individually talking to the media.</p> <p>The EFG agreed to refer any media comments to Stephen Williamson.</p>		



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5	Overview of Ecological Assessment		
5.1	<p>Simon Pearce gave a an overview of the ecological assessment undertaken in the study area to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Desk top analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brief inspections of the study area; – Searches of databases; and – Aerial photography interpretation. ▶ Supplementary fieldwork: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identification of areas where information is lacking; and – Ecological fieldwork to fill the gaps and supplement existing information (planned to commence shortly). ▶ When the preferred route is selected, detailed ecological investigation will be undertaken. This will include activities like trapping and spotlighting. <p><i>EFG members were given a short presentation and a handout on the work undertaken to date outlining the preliminary findings.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ GHD and RTA will meet statutory requirements; ▶ NPWS Comprehensive Regional Assessment information has been reviewed and then use of background data was used to calculate conservation values for mapped forest ecosystems. Note the figures provided are preliminary work in progress; ▶ Endangered ecological communities (EEC) – GHD have done some extra mapping (it was noted that the handouts were missing the aquatic ecology maps showing the EECs); and ▶ SEPP14 wetlands are located on Dalhenty Island and north bank of Wilson River near Dalhenty Island. 		
5.2	Action: GHD to send Aquatic Ecology maps to EFG representatives.	GHD	29/09/05
5.3	<p>SW advised EFG representatives that the information provided was on overview only of information gathered to date.</p> <p>EFG representatives will be sent a copy of the preliminary ecology reports and RODR prior to the next meeting.</p> <p>This will allow the EFG reps to make comparisons of each option to the reports.</p>		



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6	Feedback/Questions		
6.1	<p>Q. Who do we give additional information to?</p> <p>A. All information should be sent to GHD. This can be sent directly to Simon Pearce or through Melanie Miels.</p>		
6.2	<p>Q Why is there limited data on macroinvertebrates?</p> <p>A. At this stage we have primarily done desktop assessment and limited fieldwork. We will be doing more detailed studies as the process continues. This may include macroinvertebrates.</p>		
6.3	<p>Q. Will the preferred route come from within the study area boundary?</p> <p>A. The study area was a starting point. Following consultation, we have a couple of potential route options that go outside the study area.</p>		
6.4	<p>Q. If you progress further and find options that cross areas of ecological significance, will you apply mitigation measures and include cost-benefit analysis of these measures, as some areas of ecological value you can't go around and will need the mitigation measures. If you weighted in economical cost of ecological mitigation measures and it's impacts you would get a more accurate reflection of costs.</p> <p>A. The road is linear, trying to keep length to minimum. Our options are approximately 250 metres wide, which gives us the flexibility to avoid, as much as possible, ecologically sensitive areas while meeting design requirements and overall project objectives.</p> <p>Where an option crosses a corridor or key habitat we will be trying to minimise the length of crossing so as to minimise the amount of clearing required.</p> <p>Mitigation measures to be designed at concept design stage. At the route options stage the options are mainly considered without measures, but the potential requirements for any will be noted.</p> <p>Environment is one of a number of factors that RTA and GHD need to consider when developing options, along with function, safety and community. RTA and GHD are trying to gather as much information as possible so all factors are considered equally.</p> <p>Option costs have contingencies including for ecological mitigations measures.</p> <p>The RTA policy with respect to impacts of any nature follow the hierarchy of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Avoid; ▶ Minimise; and ▶ Mitigate. 		



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6.5	<p>Q. Benefit to provide aerial photo of vegetation and key habitats, corridors, and vegetation on private property and koala records at the next EFG meeting.</p> <p>A. We have noted that one of the handout figures is missing the key habitats and corridors information.</p>		
6.6	Action: GHD will forward updated version to EFG members.	GHD	29/09/05
6.7	<p>Q. Did GHD review Oxley Highway Upgrade REF and ecological studies? Previous consultants missed two hectares of <i>Melaleuca biconvexa</i> and records of koalas in this area.</p> <p>A. Yes.</p>	GHD to note	
6.8	<p>Q. It was raised that there may be value in moving/straightening Pacific Highway east from Rawdon Creek Nature Reserve and possibly away from Kundabung. Economic cost should not restrict options regarding environmental benefits resulting from straightening the section between Hastings River Drive and Telegraph Point.</p> <p>A. We don't have many options regarding Kundabung beyond duplication of the highway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Many problems (private land, flooding) to the east of the highway that could occur by straightening the alignment; ▶ Fauna mitigation measures, including fencing and underpasses etc. will be looked into at preferred route stage; and ▶ The RODR will give you more detailed information on why options were selected/developed in consideration to all issues, not just ecological. 		
6.9	<p>Q. Will Forests NSW receive compensation if their land is required? It was noted that any loss of state forest is loss of revenue and prefer it not to happen.</p> <p>A. Compensation is based on the same criteria as private land, in accordance with the <i>Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991</i>.</p> <p>We will try not to sever state forest where possible.</p>		
6.10	C. GHD was advised that one of the GIS layers available is Forest Types in state forest.	GHD to request	15/10/05
6.11	<p>It was noted that Hasting Council has done vegetation mapping and forest ecosystems within the local government area about eight years ago.</p> <p>Hastings Council recently commissioned Steve Phillips and Connell Wagner to do some mapping in the area.</p> <p>Kempsey Shire Council is speaking to consultants in relation to undertaking vegetation mapping – 3-year program, initially of the coastal strip (east of highway).</p>	<p>GHD to request</p> <p>GHD to request</p> <p>Noted</p>	<p>15/10/05</p> <p>15/10/05</p>



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6.12	As there is a tight timeframe for final RTA approval and printing of the RODR, input from the additional ecological studies and information collected as a result of this meeting may not be available for the route options display, but will feed into the process for selection of the preferred route.		
7	Value Management Workshop		
7.1	EFG members were advised that a value management workshop (VMW) would be held shortly after the route options display period. It will be held mid week over two days. The purpose of the workshop is to review the work undertaken to date and the route options.		
	The workshop is one of two processes that will lead to the selection of the preferred route. During the workshop, participants will develop and apply assessment criteria to assess the route options with a view to identifying the workshops preferred route. Further assessment of the options will take place by the project team outside of the VMW. A decision will be made once both processes are finalised.		
	All agencies will be invited to attend the VMW. Representatives from RTA and GHD, four CLG representatives as well as two EFG representatives.		
	We are planning to hold the next EFG meeting during the route options display so this will provide an opportunity for EFG members to discuss their issues prior to the workshop. The EFG representatives who attend the VMW will represent the EFG and also the community.		
	The RTA will pay for all meals during the two-day workshop, including dinner on day one. Travel costs are to be met by attendees.		
	The VMW attendees will be provided with a background paper and the RODR prior to the workshop. EFG members were advised that these would be a lot of reading that would need to be done prior to the meeting, which would not be limited to ecological issues.		
7.2	EFG members were asked to nominate two representatives to attend the VMW and a back-up should on of the two be unable to attend.		
	Following discussion among the EFG representatives, they agreed that the following two representatives (and one back-up) would attend the VMW:		
	Attending: Vanessa Standing and John Jeayes		
	Back-up: John Gorham		



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8	Further Questions/Discussions		
8.1	All EFG members are happy for contacts to be distributed to all members. It was noted that contact details would not appear on the website.		
8.2	C. It seems irrational to not have a loop going around the high conservation value forest ecosystems– could straighten highway to go through areas that are not of high conservation values. A. Noted.		
8.3	C. It was noted that GHD need to consider aquatic communities, habitats and macroinvertebrates etc. A. The detailed investigations will consider macroinvertebrates.		
8.4	Q. If a preferred route impacts on macroinvertebrates, could that impact have an affect on larger predators etc? A. If aiming to protect threatened species, we will look at these as keynote species. By minimising impacts on higher order, you do protect the lower order. C. An EFG member commented that they considered this approach to be contentious, however agrees in principle that you can focus on these keynote species and use the information to consider impacts to the lower order species. A. Noted.		
8.5	Q. Have we been in contact with the Oyster Farmers Group? A. We have been in contact with a number of businesses along the study area. We are looking to keep bridges as close as possible to the location of existing bridges, thereby minimising potential for direct impacts on oyster leases.		
8.6	Ecological reports and RODR will be forwarded before next meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We can also get presentation from sub consultants if deemed necessary by EFG; ▶ Can arrange bus trip for EFG representatives with CLG; and ▶ If you have any feedback before next meeting please contact GHD on 1800 154 724 (free call). 		
8.7	Q. Will we get agenda a couple of weeks in advance? A. Yes. You will receive the agenda two weeks in advance.		
8.8	Q. Is Kempsey to Eungai on website? A. Information on all projects can be found on the RTA website (www.rta.nsw.gov.au/pacific).		



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8.9	<p>Q. Are GHD's consultants in-house or independent?</p> <p>A. GHD use the following consultants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Terrestrial ecology consultant – Ecotone Ecological Consultants; and ▶ Aquatic ecology consultant – HWR Ecological. 		
8.10	<p>Q. Roughly when will the Route Options go on display?</p> <p>A. The route options display will take place roughly in the next couple of months.</p>		
8.11	<p>Q. Will an environmental impact assessment of the preferred route be undertaken?</p> <p>A. Yes. The type of environmental assessment to be undertaken is yet to be confirmed due to recent changes to NSW planning legislation, however it will comply with the current legislation.</p>		
8.12	<p>Q. If Native Vegetation (NV) Act Regulations gets made, what impact will that have?</p> <p>A. There have been a number of delays in gazettal of this regulation despite advice it was coming shortly. It shouldn't be an issue for this project, particularly if it is subject to Part 3A requirements for the environmental assessment. However, NV requirements would feed into a Part 3A environmental assessment.</p>		
8.13	<p>Q. What would trigger a Species Impact Statement (SIS)?</p> <p>A. A significant impact on a threatened species or endangered ecological community.</p> <p>There are no SIS in a Part 3A project. SIS is only a name, the Department of Planning would get feedback from DEC etc. If the project were likely to have a significant impact on threatened species, it is likely DEC would put similar requirements of SIS in its requirements.</p> <p>The new legislation doesn't really impact us until we have a preferred route and need to commence environmental assessment.</p>		
9	Housekeeping		
9.1	<p>It was agreed for all EFG members to go on a bus tour of the study area and the options once the route options are announced. The preference was for this to occur on a week day and then to conclude with the EFG meeting in the late afternoon.</p>		
9.2	<p>EFG representatives were asked to think of possible agenda items that might be useful.</p>		

Andrew Geddes
GHD Project Manager