

Submission in response to the EIS for the N2N section of the Inland Rail

My name is Helen Hunt, and I live on the property "Claremont" at what the ARTC are erroneously calling the Black Hollow sub-section of the N2N section of the proposed Inland Rail route. The area known here as "Black Hollow" is several kilometres further on to Baradine. What they are calling "Black Hollow" is in fact known as "Brigalow" and has been identified on maps for years as such. (See Six Maps). A small example of their lack of due diligence. The line is proposed to travel along several hundred metres of my boundary fence a little south of the proposed Black Hollow crossing loop.

My grandfather was the first settler to take up this land about 1870 and it has been owned by my family ever since. After my father died, my husband Wally and I carried on managing the property, changing from mainly sheep to grain farming and beef cattle. There is no permanent water on the property, so we are totally dependent on sub-artesian bores for stock and homestead water. We also have a larger property near Coonamble (which happily is not impacted by the line), which is also cropping and cattle. This obviously means constant travel between the two properties. My husband died in 2019, so now there is just me.

I have just turned 78, so this means I have many years of experience with the water that flows down from the hills, and its effect on the roads and the soil.

Although the physical impact on my farm is minimal, I have many objections to the proposed route.

1. Route Selection:

The EIS in no way demonstrates that proper diligence was taken to explore a route that would not impact so devastatingly on so many farms and people's lives, and offer no financial gain to the district.

Contrary to their statement that "the central portions of the proposal site extend through sparsely populated rural land dominated by large properties" most of the farms are small to medium with homesteads relatively close together. Within a radius here of 5 kilometres I can count 6 homes with families living in them, not counting myself. Hardly "sparsely populated". Unless you are comparing it to Paddington.

Upgrading and using the existing line to Coonamble would mean that most of the Greenfield Section would have been in the Pilliga forest, which is very sparsely populated.

The existing proposed line by-passes Coonamble, the hub of one of the most productive grain and livestock producing areas in the state. The ARTC did not properly investigate the possibility of staying on the existing line, as is clearly demonstrated in the EIS. Amongst other failings, no socio-economic study was done, so focused were they on taking the "fastest" route.

Coonamble is a very large grain receival centre. Last harvest the Grain Corp silo received 434,000 tonnes of wheat, the most in the state. To be able to get that grain directly to a port would be worth millions to the district in freight savings. As Parkes, Narromine and Narrabri are delighted with the connectivity to markets they are getting, the same advantages would apply to Coonamble and its surrounding district.

The insistence that the travel time factor, (and I quote Mr. Wankmuller), "the requirement to get that fridge between Sydney and Melbourne in the fastest possible time, is the main reason for not going to Coonamble" is clearly rubbish. How long will it take to get the "fridge" from where the train stops (nowhere near Brisbane) to its destination?

An extra 10 minutes travel time on rail is insignificant.

The other reason for choosing this route is that it would be cheaper. **Really?**

This decision was made before the actual route had been selected, when it would have been impossible to calculate the cost of construction and compensation. And nothing is built within the estimated budget.

2. Hydrology.

This alignment has the real possibility, in times of excessive rainfall, of becoming a dam wall across the flood water rushing down the creeks, (some of which start up in the Warrumbungle mountains), on its way to the Castlereagh River at Coonamble.

I should make clear that the "creeks" to which I refer are not permanently flowing. They may retain some waterholes for some time after a rainfall event during which they run, but do not normally flow, and are mostly totally dry.

It is impossible to forecast when these destructive flows will occur. Obviously in a drought nothing happens. In good years several flows a year may happen, and in a very wet year they will be up every time it rains. A big rainfall event, what we call a "gully raker", in the middle of a drought when there is no ground cover, results in catastrophic damage.

Unfortunately, when the creeks are up, it is impossible to get near them to document what the water is like at its peak. It is only when they subside is it possible to see, (or rather, imagine), from the debris and destruction left behind, how fast and fierce was the flow of water.

For example, where the alignment is on my boundary, is exactly where an unnamed creek flows across the Goorianawa road on a causeway (from being a deep creek just upstream) and then meets the Calaweri (or Frazers Creek) which crosses the Goorianawa Road a little further up, to form a very substantial mass of water flowing west. The water was 220 metres wide where it crossed the road and possibly about a metre high, or maybe more, after the last rainfall event which wasn't particularly big. It's about 200 metres from the road to the railway line. We only had 60 mms, but I believe there was about 100 mms upstream. Falls of 300 and 400 mms occur. The water which comes down Frazers Creek is

much faster and greater in volume. This is not clean water. It picks up limbs, rubbish, grass, stubble and anything else in its path.

It is important to note that the track and the flow of these creeks is not static. They have changed enormously over the years, mainly as the result of changed land use. Farming I imagine is the culprit, and will only continue to impact erratically on the flows. The volume of water is much greater now, to the extent that the last few flows have been larger than in the recent past. It will only get worse.

Culverts will not cope with this flow of dirty water. In fact, they will create more problems as the water washes and erodes around them. And it would have to be a very large bridge to do so.

If the water does not flow freely under (maybe over?) the line, the water banking up would create huge problems not only in my paddocks, but on the Goorianawa Road, which is the main Gulargambone – Baradine road. This main road is always busy with stock trucks, grain trucks and general traffic. Whereas now the water quickly subsides, an obstruction just off the road would mean it would be impassable for many hours, maybe days.

I imagine, unless it is a drought, it will be somewhat challenging to construct the line in this totally inappropriate area.

3. Scouring and Erosion.

As this railway line leaves my property and continues on through my neighbours, directly behind one house, bisecting paddocks, leaving one neighbour having to cross the line every time she leaves the house, it finds its way across undulating, then steep, very soft black soil farming country which is a constant challenge to keep from washing away. I could not think of a less suitable environment to put a railway line. In a rainfall event running water will pick up on any little hole or deviation and just start to wash. These beautiful alluvial soils are wonderful to grow stuff in, but no one would attempt to build a house on them, much less a railway line. They are about as stable as quicksand.

Clearly ARTC have ignored all the expert advice that I have read, which has been directed to them, in relation to this type of soil, stressing the unsuitability of it for a railway line.

One can only look forward to it collapsing down the hill.

4. Water required for construction.

Another very grave concern is the amount of water required during construction of the line. As there is no other water supply in the immediate vicinity, I assume they are going to extract it from the Artesian Basin.

As I said previously, I am totally dependent on underground water for stock and domestic purposes, and what they are saying in the EIS strikes terror into my heart.

- They do not say where they intend to get water from to construct the line in this area. One assumes bores.
- Four bore holes side by side would suck our supply dry.
- What impact will the energy requirements to run these bores have on our supply?
- Monitoring the drawdown as the water level drops below our pumps won't be helpful.
- Their main concern seems to be on the quality for their own use.
- Vague references to mitigating the situation is not good enough, nor is the total lack of detailed planning.

5. Fencing.

ARTC have not addressed the issue of fencing, and in particular property boundary fencing when the line is on the boundary and crossing very fast flowing water, where they propose to put culverts. How will this work? The area will have to be stock proof, but a fence in front of a culvert will be a tricky thing as it collects logs and other debris before it finally gives way.

6. Other Objections.

Too many to list them all here. Suffice to say that I support everybody else, most of whom would be putting forward much more detailed submissions, in their objections to this ill thought out and politically motivated Project.

The impact on my farm is microscopic compared to the devastation and destruction it will create on other people's farms. So many people are going to have unimaginable problems with properties split, stock and machinery access a nightmare, and their lives ruined. My support is with them.

The impact during construction will be horrendous.

A few final points from me.

- My communication with ARTC has been minimal, on the advice of NSW Farmers. Any contact would have been a waste of time anyway, as clearly they don't know what they are doing or with whom. I had an email thanking me for meeting with them and included me in the number of people they had engaged with along this route. A fabrication. And suddenly decided my postal address was 117 Gunnawarra Road, which is not my address. Their expressed "engagement" with affected landholders is not to be believed.
- There is an infestation of Hudson Pear (an horrendous spiny cactus and a Weed of National Significance) around the gravel pit and adjacent road (just before the line enters my property) which I do not see mentioned. The trucks and earthworks would be an excellent way of spreading this highly undesirable plant around the countryside.

- As the construction is on my boundary, I am wondering what measures they would put in place so my cattle can continue to graze the paddock during construction.
- Our other property is on the Tooraweanah road about 20 kms from Coonamble. I go there often and regularly. I would have to cross the line each time on the Mungery road.
- All of this environmental and economic destruction, and misery and stress for so many people, is being caused by the insistence of the big freight companies and the Federal Government that it will get "a fridge" in the quickest time between Melbourne and Brisbane. At best it is absurd, and at worst it will have a catastrophic outcome financially, environmentally, and personally on all of Australia.

I request that the Minister refuses this Project in its current form, and requires the ARTC to supply detailed factual information, sourced from independent experts, especially on the subject of exploring a more suitable route. A proper Cost Benefit Analysis must be provided.

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