

I have followed the Coffs Harbour Pacific Highway progress with interest since we moved to Coffs Harbour 20 years ago. I am delighted with the improvements to the earlier concept plan - I welcome tunnels, lower grade lines, and quieter road surfaces.

I am concerned that even with the best departmental planning constraints, the weak part of the project seems always to be monitoring and compliance of the contractor's work.

During the upgrade from Coffs to Woolgoolga, we watched trucks spill dirt which ran into the Marine Park in wet weather because the contractor failed to provide the proper protection.

We have friends near Emerald Beach who suffered intolerable noise because the sound barriers were insufficient. Other friends said they and neighbours had to remove items from shelves in their homes because the construction vibrations were so strong things fell off walls and shelves.

On the upgrades from Woolgoolga to Sapphire and then to Ballina, trees were felled without adequate clearing of wildlife. It's bad enough to be eradicating their habitat - we could at least be sure it's empty.

None of those things (and many more) should have happened. Promises are useless without regular audits and a good community response mechanism. It's not enough to have some poor Public Relations person appointed by the contractor, not the government, to handle calls and messages and complaints but given no authority to actually put the public in touch with the contractor or the Department. As a result, people often ring and blame Council, who can't do anything about it. Stonewalling is the usual description.

Of course the EIS will say it's addressing these and other issues. I will let the Action Group and others respond to specific points and sections of the Statement about interchanges, home modifications, etc. My concern is about ongoing supervision, monitoring, and auditing of day-to-day activities - making sure the contractor does what they say they will do.

When people have things falling off shelves from vibration, they need someone in authority to talk to who can address the problem immediately. And it should be addressed immediately, before their homes are damaged. Homes represent the life savings of many people and should be respected as such.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

(Mrs) Pat McKelvey