

## **Toomelah Local Aboriginal Land Council**

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### **Toomelah Aboriginal Land Council: Inland Rail Submission**

To whom it may concern,

Toomelah Aboriginal Land Council (TALC) welcomes the opportunity to submit this submission regarding the Inland Rail – North Star to NSW/QLD Border.

TALC is a statutory body formed under the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act and administers the Toomelah Mission and other land dealings with the defined area of the land council. This area also includes the township of Boggabilla and subsequent areas along the border and south towards North Star.

Toomelah Mission, as stated above is situated on the border of NSW and QLD and is located on the MacIntyre River. The Mission was established in its current location in the 1930s and is well known location within the larger Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay language group of northern NSW. Whilst Moree is the closest town in NSW, Goondiwindi is situated only 20 kilometers away and is the major service center for the area. Moree is located 130 kilometers away and the Mission is approximately 700 kilometers for Sydney.

The Mission has a population of around 300 people and is currently serviced by a health clinic, school and the Land Council. The Mission was recently the recipient of work by the Australian Army in the construction of a new community hall and office complex.

The TALC and the Mission in general have been actively engaged regarding the project since its inception due to the close proximity of the proposed route. The current route is situated only approximately two kilometers from the Mission and crosses over the major access road, Tucka Tucka Road.

Through the TALC, the Toomelah community, has welcomed the engagement with the Inland Rail and ARTC over the past two years. While there may have been a level of distrust at the beginning of the process this has been largely alleviated by this engagement and interaction by the staff of the project.

The way in which the consultation has been conducted has enabled the community and the TALC to move from one of initial apprehension to a general level of support to the project. This has been in no small part to the staff of the project and the continuity of the engagement and the willingness of the project to take on suggestions and concerns.

The TALC and the Mission would like to point out one aspect of the engagement that they are very appreciative. The initial proposal didn't include the current design and was a continuation of the solid wall with culverts with a smaller bridge spanning the MacIntyre river.

The community had some very strong views and history on the flooding of the MacIntyre River and impacts on the community and subsequent access. This was communicated to the engagement team over numerous meetings and it was pleasing to see that along with further flood modeling that the design was altered to incorporate the larger bridge design. This was very well received within the community.

The TALC would like to make a number of specific comments which are outlined below but would say that the past engagement and the ongoing communication with Inland Rail has been excellent and the Mission and the TALC are looking forward to continuing this through the next phase.

- **Ongoing Engagement:**

While the TALC appreciates the work that has occurred up to the date it is imperative that it continues to enable ongoing support for the project. Ongoing open and clear dialogue on the project is essential to the Mission to ensure the limitation of a false narrative surrounding the work.

- **Employment:**

The TALC is very keen to continue the dialogue around employment and training opportunities. This is seen as a priority issue to the TALC and the Mission to ensure that all means possible are taken to engage local residents in Toomelah and Boggabilla over the potential for employment in the project.

- **Business/Economic Opportunities:**

Along with employment, TALC is also looking at ensuring that any business or other economic opportunities are made available to the land council. The TALC feels that the more that the council can engage on more economic opportunities the more the Mission and the wider Aboriginal community will benefit.

- **Cultural Heritage:**

TALC is currently involved in cultural heritage matters along the route but would point out that absolutely essential to continue to be open and transparent in regard to future clearance work.

While the TALC appreciates that other parties may need to be involved, the Land Council has statutory duties in regard to cultural heritage and advises that at all times it must be engaged.

- **Ongoing Sponsorships:**

TALC and other individuals and organisations within the Mission and at Boggabilla have been the recipients of sponsorships and grants from Inland Rail, and while these have been greatly appreciated, there is a sense that they could be seen as tokenistic.

To alleviate this perception, the TALC would propose that due to the proximity of the Mission and its uniqueness to the project as the only Aboriginal community effected, that monies should be set aside to be jointly administered by TALC and Inland Rail on a quarterly basis. This measure would enable both parties to work together to enable the Mission to develop key initiatives in regard to community wellbeing. The TALC feels that this one measure would assist the Mission greatly supporting the project and assisting the community in its future aspirations.

- **Noise:**

While there have been some studies regarding the impact of noise on the Mission, the TALC feels that there could be more engagement specially over this issue. The impact of noise from the trains will be noticeable within the Mission and will have an impact on the everyday lives of the community members.

While the TALC has had access to noise studies showing that the work is within the requirements, it does not take away from the fact that now there is little or no outside noise to the community. This will be a major change once the project is completed and the trains start and is something that may cause concern to the project further in the future.

The TALC would recommend that some testing of the noise level within the Mission is conducted to simulate a period that trains will be running. This should encompass both day and nighttime as trains will be running over 24-hour periods.

- **Safety:**

The safety of the residents of the Mission is of utmost importance to the TALC and more specifically the safety of the children. TALC has made Inland Rail aware of its concerns regarding access to the bridge and impacts that may have. Continued dialogue on this important matter will be essential.

- **Access:**

While the community understands that there will be some disruption during construction it is hoped that it is fully consulted about any impacts to access during this time. As mentioned, the proposed route crosses the only major sealed road to the Mission and the as such all care must be taken to ensure that any access is not limited and that there is minimal impact to the daily life of the Mission.

The TALC would like to recommend that there is committee formed closer to construction to ensure that all activity during this time is consistent back to the community in general.

As mentioned, the TALC welcomes this opportunity to comment in support of the project and to comment on specific issues of interest to the Mission and wider community. The TALC looks forward to the project moving forward and the continuing dialogue with the community.