



## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE Inc

29-31 Skinner Street

South Grafton 2460

Phone/ Fax: 02 6643 1863

Web site: [www.cec.org.au](http://www.cec.org.au)

E-mail: [admin@cec.org.au](mailto:admin@cec.org.au)

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The Hon Pru Goward MP  
NSW Minister for Planning  
[office@goward.minister.nsw.gov.au](mailto:office@goward.minister.nsw.gov.au)

The Hon Rob Stokes MP  
NSW Minister for Environment  
[office@stokes.minister.nsw.gov.au](mailto:office@stokes.minister.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Minister

### **Re threat to Koalas from the Woolgoolga to Ballina Pacific Highway upgrade,**

We have just received the RMS's latest, July 2014, "Letter to Householders", referring specifically to the plight of the Wardell Koala population that is under serious threat from the Pacific Highway upgrade that you, as Planning Minister, have recently approved

The letter extols the virtues of the RMS's care of environmental matters, claiming it "*seeks to avoid minimise, mitigate or compensate for impact on sensitive ecology in all our highway upgrade projects*". **All of this is, of course, prefaced by the phrase "*where possible*".**

In relation to the Wardell Koala situation it is clearly **possible** to avoid the sensitive Koala habitat by simply widening the existing highway to 4 lane divided status.

That option is said to actually be the cheaper one, but will the RMS change its mind?

**No**, that instrumentality has proved time and time again along the entire highway upgrade north from Newcastle, to be totally intractable. It puts its plans on exhibition, usually presenting multiple options, all of which will have significant social and environmental impacts, and which immediately divides the affected community, a very successful strategy which allows the RMS to select its preferred route (not the community's preferred route), and claim 75% of the community supports their choice, because collectively they opposed the other routes that would have impacted on their lives and livelihoods.

The letter to householders also claims your approval comes "*with strict conditions governing appropriate management of threatened species, including the koala*". So let us look at the RMS's record in this respect, selecting one already completed section of the Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrade, the 7km section at Glenugie, south of Grafton.

Because that section was going to destroy the core population of threatened Square-fruited Ironbarks (some 8,000 trees in all), a species that only occurs in scattered sub-populations across a 50kmm area of the Clarence Valley, and nowhere else in the world, there were also "**strict conditions**" placed on the consent.

The RMS's stated aim to “*seek to avoid minimise, mitigate or compensate for impact*”, was nowhere to be seen. Most of the damage could have been avoided by simply adding another two lanes to the existing highway. But no, it had to be an entirely different alignment, which was no shorter, and entailed the clearing of a 150m wide corridor through the Glenugie State Forest, with the old highway now serving as a rural access road to adjoining properties. There was no mitigation, the actual footprint of the new road is less than 45m from one table drain to the other, but a further 40 to 50 metres of bushland was flattened on either side.

It was all left to offsets, a Federal Minister's requirement, and a portion of land was purchased to provide a certain area of good quality Square-fruited Ironbark habitat, and more degraded land to be rehabilitated with the threatened Ironbarks.

That section of highway was completed 5 years ago, and to the best of our knowledge, not a single Square-fruited Ironbark seed has been collected, much less propagated or planted, to fulfil the offset requirement. Not only that, but the land has not been placed under a conservation covenant, and it is currently leased to adjoining landowners for grazing purposes, one of the most serious threats to the survival of biodiversity generally, and identified as a threat to the Ironbarks themselves.

We attach a letter that was sent to Minister Hunt who is currently waiting to sign off on the Referral, pointing out just some of the threats to rare and endangered species that the upgrade will cause in the Clarence Valley, all of which could have been avoided by truly “upgrading” the existing highway rather than the building of an entirely separate motorway, directly through some of the highest conservation value forests remaining in the Clarence Valley.

A major concern expressed in that report is the plight of the endangered Coastal Emu population, now numbering less than 100, the last in coastal NSW. The proposed route will dissect the Emu's range and there are real fears that it will be the 'last straw' that will result in the species' extinction.

The list of threatened flora species identified in the RMS's Final Terrestrial Ecology Report contains 24 species that have been recorded in the vicinity of the upgrade. The Clarence Environment Centre is currently taking part in a major, Federal Government funded, biodiversity conservation project across some 50 properties in the Pillar Valley, right alongside the proposed upgrade. Part of that project is a comprehensive survey of flora on those properties, undertaken on a voluntary basis by our botanists. **So far this year, we have identified over 800 native species, including 16 threatened, and dozens of other rare and protected species. Of those 16 threatened species, 10 do not appear on the RMS's list, because they are not yet recorded on the NSW wildlife Atlas, which highlights the ineffective flora and fauna surveys undertaken by the RMS to date, which has added nothing to the body of knowledge.**

Those species are: *Angophora robur*, *Arthraxon hispidus*, *Belvisia mucronata*, *Geodorum terrestre*, *Lindernia alsinoides*, *Maundia triglochinosides*, *Oberonia complanata*, *Rotala tripartita*, *Tetrabaculum melaleucaphilum*, and *Eleocharis tetraquetra*. What this work does is confirm the region's status as a world renowned biodiversity hotspot, something that has to be protected, not destroyed in this shameful “empire building” exercise that has no long-term benefit to locals.

We do not wish to be regaled with the supposed mitigation measures that are being undertaken, we have been told about those repeatedly. All we want to know is why this is allowed to happen, and why has the RMS not been forced to minimise impacts, and follow through on consent conditions?

Yours sincerely

John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary