



V.O.W.W.
Voice of Wallalong and Woodville
Including Localities of Rural West Ward

All correspondence on this issue via: secretary@econetworkps.org

Transport for NSW
Regional and Outer Metro Division

ATTN: Corinne Thompson, Senior Manager Hunter/Central Coast

Email: Corinne.Thompson@transport.nsw.gov.au

8 May 2024

Traffic Issues related to Quarry Development in the Lower Hunter Region - specifically on the operation of the three at-grade intersections (Italia Road, Medowie Road, Bucketts Way) and the Tarean Road Interchange with the Pacific Highway between Raymond Terrace and Karuah in the MidCoast and Port Stephens Council areas.

Purpose

The purpose of this correspondence is to detail specific unresolved traffic and road network issues highlighted at the online meeting held 12 April 2024 between representatives of community groups and TfNSW officers. We look forward to further discussion of these issues at a future meeting, as agreed on 12 April.

Context

The operational life of a hard rock quarry is around 30 plus years – with expected modifications and extensions typically extending the quarry's operations, footprint and environmental impacts for a further 30 years. As a matter of course, quarries change the landscape, local road networks and the local character of surrounding environments into the future. Each hard rock quarry impacts the environment beyond the actual footprint of the operation, particularly with resulting traffic impacts.

Ten (10) hard rock quarries are either operational or in the planning process in this small part of the Lower Hunter region.

Major Concerns

The expected and far-reaching increase in volumes of quarry haulage vehicle movements on the Pacific Highway between Raymond Terrace and Karuah raises a giant red flag concerning the ability of the three at-grade intersections (Italia Road, Medowie Road & Bucketts Way) as well as the grade-separated Tarean Road Interchange, to function safely for all road users if and when all quarries are approved.

As ratepayers and residents, we also hold valid and practical concerns about the ability of the local Council managed local road network to manage the predicted quarry related traffic – both in normal operation and particularly in times of emergencies and climate/weather related

events (such as bush fires and flooding) when Pacific Highway traffic is diverted to alternate routes.

It is our contention that:

- TfNSW should produce a cumulative impact assessment of the likely impacts from the combined number of proposed and operational quarries in our region.
- the road infrastructure necessary for the safe operation of the road network for all users must be in place *prior to* any further approvals of new or extended quarry operations,
- any upgrades necessary to facilitate the quarry industry's utilisation of the road network at the three current at-grade intersections should provide full grade-separated interchanges, and
- these upgrades should be financed by the quarry industry and the costs integrated into their project cost/benefit analysis.

We understand TfNSW consults with the Department of Planning and directly with the proponent for each quarry development, but not with community groups – you appear to hear about community concerns only indirectly via our representative Councils. In this case our Councils are on the record as advocating for upgrades to full grade-separated interchanges at the three current at-grade intersections. But, we submit, routine direct consultation with community groups would ensure that unfiltered grass roots perspectives are better understood.

When dealing with each quarry proposal, TfNSW advice appears to be consistently accepted at face value by the Department of Planning. That advice often contradicts local community evidence and experience in that it fails to include the **cumulative and combined traffic impacts** caused by each successive quarry development both on the Highway and the local road network. Little or no consideration is given to other potential and existing industrial use. As a consequence, actual traffic impacts on local communities are not recognised.

For example, Martins Creek Quarry haulage vehicles have been using sub-standard rural roads such as Butterwick Road (in the Port Stephens LGA) to transport product to the Pacific Highway. Other motorists have to drive both defensively and evasively when encountering haulage vehicles. (*ref: community presentations to IPC*)

Another example is the proposed Stratford Renewable Energy Hub which anticipates a considerable increase in workforce vehicles and heavy vehicle traffic using the Bucketts Way and the Pacific Highway – including oversize/overmass trucks - during its construction phase (*ref. SEARS*).

The GHD reports, prepared for Boral Resources, Eagleton Syndicate and ARDG regarding the proposed Italia Road Intersection upgrade indicate a number of road safety issues associated with the increase of heavy vehicle movements on the Pacific Highway, just from the three Italia Road quarries. Such safety issues have been apparent to the community for some time, and have also been raised by Councils, yet appear not to have been recognised by either TfNSW or Department of Planning (*ref. IPCN Determination Deep Creek Quarry December 2023 -January 2024*).

At our last meeting your officers explained the processes involved and the distinction between strategic transport planning and assessment of specific projects, and suggested that the Department of Planning should be present at our next meeting.

We are aware of the planning process and to be clear, our contention is that the current processes and distinctions between and within Government Departments are not working to deliver sensible and safe road network outcomes.

We submit that there needs to be a better way for issues relevant for road network strategic planning to be 'brought forward' and factored into the assessment of and planning for each quarry project.

As there is little evidence of strategic planning for quarry development in our region, we consequently face road network safety risks that we believe fall within the remit of TfNSW's responsibility of community welfare and safety, yet we have not - until now - been afforded an opportunity to express our concerns.

We plan to meet separately with the Department of Planning to discuss the document '*Strategic and Conservation Planning for Hard Rock Quarries in the Lower Hunter*' previously sent to relevant Ministers and copied to TfNSW, which specifically cites road network and traffic concerns amongst other issues.

Our concerns can be summarised by stating that we believe there is inadequate consideration of the cumulative and combined safety risks and impacts on our local and State road network from the number of hard rock quarries currently in the development pipeline.

Next steps

We seek your timely written response answering our questions raised in the attached Appendix of Issues, prior to our next meeting. We trust TfNSW recognises and acknowledges the urgent need to address these matters prior to any further quarry development approvals.

We confirm that we would like to see our Councils represented at our next meeting, and note that MidCoast Council's Director of Infrastructure and Engineering Services, and Port Stephens Council's Group Manager, Community Futures have indicated their interest and willingness to attend, if available.

We do appreciate TfNSW's consideration of and willingness to discuss these matters and look forward to your prompt reply. We suggest a meeting date during the first two weeks of June 2024.

After receipt of your response, we will prepare a meeting agenda.

Nigel Waters: EcoNetwork Port Stephens, nigelwaters@econetworkps.org

Megan Benson: Gloucester Environment Group megabens@gmail.com

Margarete Ritchie: Voices of Wallalong and Woodville, nmritchie@bigpond.com

Cc: Anna Kerr: Save Balickera savebalickera@proton.com

Appendix: Questions for TfNSW

Traffic Issues related to Quarry Development in the Lower Hunter Region

APPENDIX OF ISSUES – Questions for TfNSW

1. On what grounds did TfNSW change its opinion that grade separation for right hand turns, as recommended to Stone Ridge Quarry in 2020, was no longer required at the Italia Road and Pacific Highway intersection?
2. Given that the nature of hard rock quarry operations is 30 years plus, why did TfNSW stipulate a ten year horizon for consideration of total impact on the road network from the quarries financing the Italia Road Upgrade proposal?
3. How will the Italia Road and Pacific Highway Upgrade proposal comply with TfNSW Future Transport Aspirations in terms of efficiency and sustainability?
4. Given there is a predicted 20% in outside traffic growth along the Pacific Highway over the next ten years, has TfNSW conducted a cumulative vehicle count which includes other freight haulage vehicles passing the Italia Road, Medowie Road and Bucketts Way intersections to the Highway?
5. Why is historical Council advocacy for full grade-separated interchanges at Italia Road, Medowie Road and Bucketts Way not publicly acknowledged in the TIA assessment process for each individual quarry?
6. Can the traffic information, particularly safety risks, provided by the GHD Traffic Study for the proposed Italia Road Upgrade be extrapolated and used to predict traffic conditions at Bucketts Way and Medowie Road at grade intersections? (ref Karuah South Quarry TIA - 4.6 Safety assessment)
7. What is a 'medium term upgrade'? Is that an appropriate way to plan and implement upgrades specifically designed to accommodate quarry development, when we know quarries will operate for 30+ years?
8. The Seaham Quarry (EIS currently on exhibition) - Project traffic was not considered in the SIDRA modelling for their traffic impact assessment (GHD 2023a). Other operational quarries, beyond Italia Road, have not been fully considered in any cumulative traffic and road network impact assessment. When access to the Pacific Highway is deemed as vitally important to each quarry operation, why isn't the wider cumulative impact of the quarry industry's reliance on safe access to and utility of the Pacific Highway fully assessed?
9. For example - Why didn't the modelling produced by GHD on the Tarean Road/Pacific Hwy interchange include the haulage vehicles using the interchange from the existing Karuah East and the proposed Karuah South Quarries?
10. Why didn't the modelling produced by GHD include the approximate number of potential quarry haulage vehicles exiting the Bucketts Way to turn right on the highway and joining the other quarry vehicles travelling South at Twelve Mile Creek?

11. Noting the proponent for Hillview Quarry (Bucketts Way, Booral) is not anticipating further necessary roadworks other than works associated with their access road, how and when will the conditions of consent for the Deep Creek Quarry Proposal, including c) iv) *measures to mitigate the impact of heavy vehicle movements on the performance of Bucketts Way and Pacific Highway intersection, including during peak holiday periods* be addressed by TfNSW, Deep Creek and Hillview Quarries?
12. The DPIE stated that advice from TfNSW, even considering the current ‘medium’ risk issues, found no issues or objections to the safe operation of the Bucketts Way intersection potentially created by the Deep Creek Quarry project . (ref GHD Italia Rd and Pacific Hwy Intersection Upgrade Concept Design Road Safety Audit Boral Resources (NSW) Pty Ltd July 26, 2023) TfNSW formed part of the consultation team for the proposed Italia Road Upgrade, which happened concurrently with assessment of the Deep Creek Quarry development application. Up to 50 truck movements per hour are expected to use the Bucketts Way intersection to travel South from the Deep Creek Quarry operation. More are likely in the future if and when Hillview Quarry gains approval. Why didn’t the Italia Road Upgrade proposal specifically consider the likelihood of Deep Creek’s haulage truck movements departing the Pacific Highway exiting across Pacific Highway and by necessity slowing north bound Highway traffic at the Bucketts Way intersection?
13. Noting that no holiday traffic count has been conducted at the Bucketts Way intersection prior to approval of the Deep Creek Quarry Project, did TfNSW consider community submissions of objection which raised unacceptable traffic impacts from that Quarry project?
14. When and how does TfNSW consult directly with the community about potential road network changes resulting from proposed industrial expansion?
15. How can the community communicate directly with TfNSW when trying to explain potential traffic hazards from proposed developments, rather than having to rely on making submissions to the Department of Planning on individual projects?

On request, we can provide further references to documents to support the above issues and questions.