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GOONDIWINDI COUNCIL QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO SENATE ENQUIRY

Goondiwindi Regional Council has long had many problems with the ARTC process and attitude as we head towards the construction of this much awaited National Building Project. Moreover, I must repeat, our council is a strong advocate of the project and only objects to the mythology, defiance and arrogant attitude displayed by ARTC in the decision making process. For twenty years and back as far as the Everal Compton days, we have long looked forward to the day an Inland Rail would connect the nation and provide a much needed corridor for our region.

This current drought exemplifies the need for national logistics as different parts of the nation enjoy better seasons than others.

Past events that raise concerns for Goondiwindi Regional Council:

Since 1956, Goondiwindi has been protected by a levee bank that has never been breached.

In 2011, a peak flood of 10.64m tested the integrity of the levee bank when sandbagging was required on the western end of the levee. Cr Kearney, Chairman of the LDMG (*Refer Page 8 of presentation*) oversaw the operation once the group was activated, and despite the fact that only one of the three rivers reached flood peaks (*Refer Page 3,4 & 5 of presentation*), the town had no freeboard for any extra rises. In fact, the Macintyre River actually flowed backwards at the junction.

2011 was the most recent example of what now happens given extra development and surely exhibits that no extra river height can be tolerated in a flooding situation for the town of Goondiwindi. This is what raises our greatest concerns.

Sequence of events:

In early 2016, the original proposal was suggested whereby the Inland Rail route would actually bypass Goondiwindi and take an upper Yetman route (*Refer Page 2 of presentation*). The reason in part given at this stage was to avoid the need to cross the Macintyre floodplain.

Goondiwindi Regional Council, along with many other objectors lobbied this case and the decision was made to realign closer to Goondiwindi providing an opportunity for the rich agricultural town of Goondiwindi and centres to the west and south west in NSW to benefit from the adjusted corridor.

Thankfully, this was supported and at that stage, everyone was of the belief the line would take the Brownfield site of the existing rail line to Turkey Lagoon and cross the river closer to Goondiwindi.

MCA Process:

Our council made many representations to what was included in the MCA process and things like the weighting given to flooding was ignored in our requests. ARTC continually stated that this was a standard templet used on all sectors, which again, is questionable. It is unbelievable to think that time constraints and flood issues could have the same weighting when it comes to the assessment of crossing one of Australia's largest floodplain. (*Refer Page 54 of presentation*)

Even more disillusioning was the fact that the preferred place to cross the Macintyre River was acknowledged as Option A (closer to Boggabilla and Goondiwindi) in the MCA results yet ARTC continued investigations down the Option D1 route (across the Macintyre Floodplain). No one was prepared for this decision and what is more, to this date, I am not aware of one person that supports the D1 crossing of the floodplain let alone the talk of using earth banks, yet ARTC proceed to an EIS process. *(Refer Page 39 of presentation)*

Community Consultation:

Our council cannot complain about the amount of Community Consultation conducted by ARTC. If anything, it was way over the top. However, the quality of consultation and the ability of ARTC to listen and translate was extremely poor. On numerous occasions, we attended Community Meetings or Council briefing sessions. None of the suggestions or objectives of the public or council were recognized or recorded in original or subsequent decision making processes. It was a matter of come, listen and leave ticking off the Community Consultation box. It was an extremely poor and disappointing process to say the least.

Unfortunately, the Minister of the time made a final decision purely based on the information supplied by ARTC, which was far from what the people on the ground were expressing.

1. The flood modelling used by ARTC in the first instance was 1976 flood plain mapping *(Refer Page 12 of presentation)* – pre any development. Surely, blind Freddie could envisage that the development (both irrigation and State Infrastructure like roads) since 1976 was going to have a major effect on any decision. Surely, this was the first flaw that Richard Wankmuller referred to as a possible flaw in the senate estimates. *(Refer Page 36 of presentation)*
2. On numerous occasions, our council asked for the original cost comparison that the minister used to compare the two routes, bearing in mind, that a cost comparison was part of the MCA process that carried certain weighting.

Despite those regular requests, to this day, we have never been advised that information. In fact on one occasion, Rob McNamara of ARTC informed us that no cost were prepared which makes a complete mockery of that part of the MCA process. *(Refer Page 39 of presentation)*

3. Another example is we as council and other landholders were asked to submit a list of local water experts that could supply information and possibly assist in the decision making process. Our council submitted two names and I am aware that another NSW landholder submitted another one. *(Refer Page 55 of presentation)*

Until April 9, 2019, no contact had been made with any of these people again making a complete mockery of the consultation process. Again, we have asked the question many times, why were these people not consulted earlier and the only reply I can get is – I do not know.

Not a satisfactory answer and again I ask the question, how Minister Chester signed off on the selected route without all of the relevant information. *(Refer Page 40 of presentation)*

4. There are often references made to the 24-hour time restraints placed on the Inland Rail delivery capabilities. Despite requesting on numerous occasions more details on how this was established and the reasoning behind it, our council have not received a suitable answer. We are fully aware of the business case, which supports the project and how 80% of the freight is general freight point to point – 11% is resource based and only 9% agricultural needs.

With this in mind, surely a business case comparison has been considered if the time factor blew out to say 25 hours. Surely, users like Woolworths and others, if approached and advised there is a possible flaw, which may see a town like Goondiwindi flooded, they may have a different requirement – or does the whole project fall over. Once again, we have never received a suitable reply.

5. A full list of questions submitted by council to ARTC through a government deputation of Minister Coulton, Minister Littleproud and Richard Wankmuller are referred to on *pages 37, 39, 40 & 41 of presentations*.
6. At the final meeting with council before proceeding to the NSW EIS stage, we were informed that the proposal would go to the NSW Government with a second passing loop in the middle of the flood plain. Passing loops are usually not constructed on bridges but on earth mounds, so one can only imagine the angst this caused after all of the protesting our Council had done to date about the suggestion of D1. We were told not to worry about that, as they were hoping to remove it at a later stage. Exactly what was ARTC thinking we would say about this little hidden gem?

I immediately made enquiries with Richard Wankmuller who informed me he knew nothing about an extra passing lane.

Then at a subsequent meeting of Mayors in Toowoomba, Rob McNamara informed me that the statement was a mistake and we should not have been told that. Unfortunately, to this day, we do not know if there is to be a passing loop and if so, where it will be placed. Common sense would say towards the Wearne end but there has not been too much common sense to date in the process. This is classical of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing.
7. One of the major problems comes from the fact that in this area anyway, there has been a major turnover of staff. It leads one to believe that any information provided has been lost in the wash and it is exasperating to say the least to go over and over the same item only to find the information provided had not been accepted by ARTC.

Initial Modelling:

Council and landholders alike met many times with ARTC modelling experts and many times, we challenged the modelling. It simply did not stack up and once again, until April 9, when our local contacts were accepted, along with Dick Sudholz, our questions were ignored.

We continually questioned why the sector Boggabilla to Goondiwindi had not been included in the modelling only to be informed it had no bearing on flooding issues.

At a major cost to council, and using the local flood experts like Dick Sudholz (*Refer reference Page 28 of presentation*) that ARTC chose to ignore for three years, we had a mapping presentation provided which ground truthed the infrastructure improvements and in fact proved that there was a possible major effect downstream of Boggabilla. Goondiwindi had recorded a record flood level in 2011 with less volumes of water and it was obvious a problem existed but once again missed by the ARTC experts.

Thankfully, Richard Wankmuller attended that briefing and on the day recommended that the modelling be recalculated to include the Boggabilla to what is locally known as the Callandoon Creek sector. We thank Richard Wankmuller for his attendance in that regard. (*Refer Pages 10 - 25 of presentation*)

Current Position:

Being a border town, we often find ourselves in awkward cross border situations and this is a classic example. It is the opinion of our council that a possible problem exists with or without an undesirable rail crossing of the Macintyre floodplain and that matter has since been raised with the Qld Premiers Department and the office of the Cross Border Commissioner.

What is hard to accept is that without the extraordinary and somewhat extreme efforts of our council, bordering on civil disobedience, the possible problems highlighted and now accepted by ARTC, would never have been acknowledged and this project would have proceeded with dire consequences.

How could ARTC have missed such relevant and important information with all of the supposed expert flood modelling they profess to have at their disposal?

The decision to announce D1 as the preferred option came as a major surprise to everyone in our region. From the minute D1 was announced, it has been the opinion of Goondiwindi Regional Council that if the route

had to cross the floodplain (primarily to appease the time restraints), then the only acceptable solution would be an elevated bridge from the Qld side to Wearne on the NSW side.

This is a statement; I as Mayor of Goondiwindi Regional Council have made on numerous occasions and I do not vary from that opinion.

Other areas affected by ARTC decisions:

In the matter of Border to Gowrie, we have not experienced the same amount of difficulty. We have however encountered major problems with ARTC's insistence on not utilising state land in preference to private land resumptions. We have consistently been told that the State Government will not allow the use of such land but when we approach the state at different times, the stories are very much contradicted and it appears in some cases, approaches have never been made. It appears easier to blame the state when in fact, that may not be the case.

Summary

To say the process used by ARTC in the NS2B sector has been totally unacceptable is a gross understatement, people of this region feel totally shunned and ignored by ARTC and continually express disbelief at the divide and conquer approach adopted by ARTC in the community process. There are numerous reports of one individual being told one thing and the next person being told something different.

At one of the final meetings of council, we were informed, just as the meeting was to conclude, that a passing loop would be included in the floodplain, something that not even Richard Wankmuller was aware of.

How could ARTC (knowing that our council had grave doubts about any sort of earth banks in the floodplain) continue with the EIS application and not intend to advise council of the possibility of a passing loop. Admittedly, the staff did say not too worry as they had hoped it would be removed - little satisfaction and even less confidence when at a meeting in Toowoomba I was told I should not have been given that information.

Cases like this give you absolutely no confidence in the processes used.

ARTC appear to be a company on a mission to get a result at any price and have extended little to no regard for the people affected by this decision. It is unbelievable that ARTC could have the audacity to proceed with the NSW EIS with community support totalling NIL.

Surely, this must tell you something.

This preparation has been prepared by myself, Graeme Scheu, Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council in conjunction with Dion Jones, Director of Engineering Services of Goondiwindi Regional Council, both of which are available to appear at any hearing that may be programmed in the near future.

Cr Graeme Scheu
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