

# Factual discrepancies in forestry inquiry

## Deputy Prime Minister seems not to care - Miles Noller reports

The Deputy Prime Minister's inquiry into the Inland Rail's forestry crossing of the Darling Downs contains factual discrepancies, according to independent observers.

But the Government and ARTC seem unperturbed that some "facts" used might be to the detriment of many landholders along the route, and long term users of the rail line when an alternative is available.

A dozen or so professional soil conservationists, who were trained and worked for the State Government, are questioning information used in the inquiry into a potential forestry corridor from Yelarbon to Cecil Plains and then to Wellcamp Airport and Gowrie Junction.

Some of these soil conservationists conducted extensive flood plain studies along the Condamine River and consulted widely with numerous meetings of landholders.

The work of these soil men, whether on the flood plains or in hill country requiring contour banks and waterways, was based on recognised engineering principles.

The science of stubble and crop cover to reduce erosion, strip cropping and the reduction of water velocity and concentration, were part of their regular work.

Yet ARTC never consulted with them in the design of the Millmerran to Pittsworth crossing of the Condamine River, preferring the advice of engineers seemingly without local knowledge.

These soil men agree that if the Condamine has to be crossed, the Cecil Plains to Mt Tyson route was preferable. And this corridor prevented much good agricultural land from being dissected and cut up by a rail corridor.

Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack claimed in Toowoomba recently that Federal Cabinet decided in 2017 that the rail corridor would be where ARTC wants it, via Millmerran, Brookstead, Pittsworth, Southbrook, Wellcamp and Charlton.

So one might ask: "What has been the purpose of all the community consultation meetings since?"

A further question is: "What was the purpose of the recent inquiry into a potential forestry corridor?"

"Was this inquiry simply for political reasons, as though it was meant to fudge the result?" some might ask.

The forestry corridor report from the Deputy Prime Minister's office contains a number of factual discrepancies.

- **Factual discrepancy 1:** Properties affected. The Government/ARTC report claims the forestry route would add 134 properties truncated/dissected by Inland Rail. WRONG. Only 60 properties are expected to be directly affected on the Yelarbon, Cecil Plains, Wellcamp to Gowrie corridor. Yet on the ARTC route, through Inglewood, Millmerran, Pittsworth, Southbrook, to Gowrie, 260 properties are cut through. That is 200 more than on the forestry route. The Government and ARTC seem uncaring to impact 260 properties when about 60 are affected with the alternative forestry corridor. One farmer has 7km of rail line through his property.

Another has a cutting through the farm, 200m long by 30m deep. Others are losing homes and buildings and the viability of some farms is destroyed.

- **Factual discrepancy 2:** Floodplain length - The soil men claim

the flood plain length on the Millmerran, Pampas, Brookstead to Yarranlea crossing is 31km long, not 12km as claimed by ARTC, from their experience with flooding, actual records, and landholder reports.

Even the Gore Highway at Yarranlea was cut by flooding in one event but is not accepted by ARTC, and there has been flooding from Hall's feedmill to Millmerran. But this is not accepted by ARTC.

The soil men state the floodplain from Cecil Plains is also 31km long. Their flood studies show that flooding between the Condamine and the North Branch is rare because a diversion bank takes overland flow from the plain to the Cecil Plains weir on the Condamine.

They claim the numerous irrigation ring tanks on farms has altered the flow across this section of the plain, and landholders use the old rail embankment to help fill their ring tanks. This different flood behaviour has not been recognised by ARTC.

- **Factual discrepancy 3:** Length of rail line - The soil men accept the length of proposed rail line through the forestry to Cecil Plains and then to Wellcamp and Gowrie is 15km longer, but NOT 20km or 30km or 40km as the Deputy Prime Minister's report claims.

The soil men suggest the straight and even run through the forestry and across the Cecil Plains area should be faster for train travel. The forestry run could also be the basis for a new dingo check fence that landholders are asking for.

- **Factual discrepancy 4:** Easy construction, fewer crossings. ARTC and the Federal Government have never studied a forestry corridor for the Inland Rail, it seems. Maybe they looked at it on a computer screen, but never as a serious option. Yet they claim to have conducted an inquiry into the forestry option.

Those who have inspected the forestry terrain "on the ground" suggest it would be easy going for construction. For about 30km it could follow a high voltage electricity line.

There would be four or five major road crossings of the rail line, compared to the dozens of overpasses, underpasses and level crossings on the Millmerran Pittsworth run.

The Deputy Prime Minister seems not to have compared like with like, with confusion about the width of the corridor in different locations, the batter of the line foundation (two to one or three to one), but ARTC appears to have valued the forestry land five times as much as the first class farming land.

Any hectare of forestry land developed must be replaced with five hectares in offsets. There are no offsets required for quality farm land.

- **Factual discrepancy 5:** Confused about route - The Deputy Prime Minister's inquiry of the Forestry Corridor is full of confusions of what actual route it is studying.

The soil conservationists group proposed a corridor through the forestry of Yelarbon to Cecil Plains, then from Cecil Plains across the flood plain to Mt Tyson, then to Wellcamp Airport to Charlton and Gowrie Junction.

Yet the inquiry "muddies the water" by including a Mt Tyson to Kingsthorpe option, indeed it mentions an Oakey section, and it assumes the Wellcamp to Gowrie section goes via its own proposed

route across Brimblecombe Road, and the Warrego Highway near Gowrie Mountain. It seems the Deputy Prime Minister cannot even get the comparisons correct. So how can the facts be correctly assessed.

- **Factual discrepancy 6: Costings not provided** - The Deputy Prime Minister could not even put a cost on the proposed Forestry Corridor, so how can a factual comparison be made.

It is known that the first serious ARTC Inland Rail corridor across the Darling Downs was referred to as “the base case” or “base case modified” and proceeded via Inglewood (or the forestry to Millmerran), to west of Pittsworth to the Mt Tyson area, through the Aubigny, Beef City, area to the existing railway line between Oakey and Kingsthorpe.

The Wellcamp Airport was constructed, and in 2017 the then Transport Minister Darren Chester decided between four options, this “base case” and three other options which passed next to Wellcamp Airport. The option chosen by ARTC and the Government is said to cost \$140 million more than the base case, and it is believed the cost of the forestry option would be in a similar range to the base case.

- **Factual discrepancy 7: Wrong corridor used** - The Deputy Prime Minister’s inquiry assumed the soil men’s option proceeded from Wellcamp Airport via the ARTC route across Westbrook Creek, across Brimblecombe Road, across the Warrego Highway between Gowrie Mountain and Zimm’s Corner with a seven-metre high bridge. But this route destroys too many quality stud and lucerne farms.

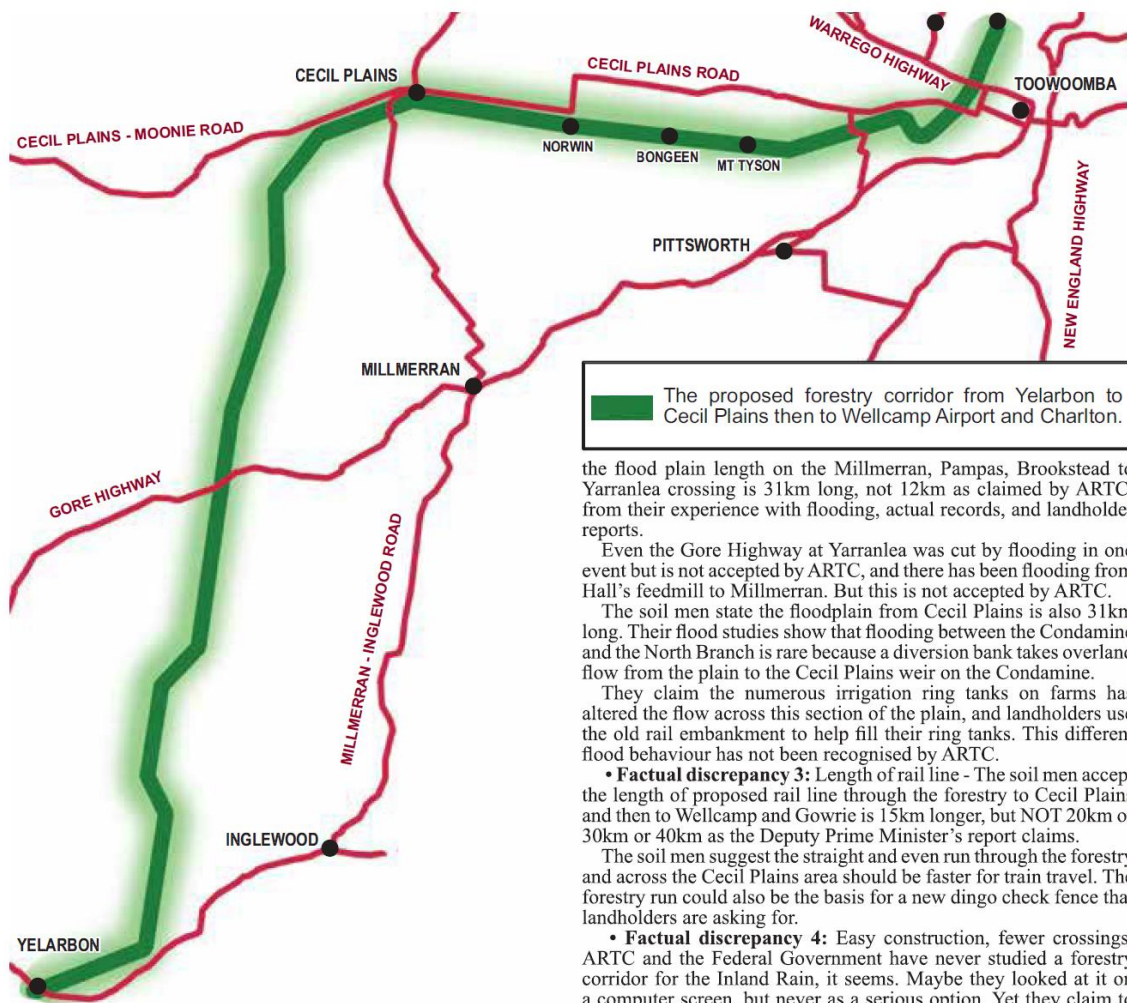
The soil men proposed the Inland Rail from Wellcamp Airport should follow the Toowoomba bypass on its western side, and it would then cross under the Warrego Highway at Charlton, proceeding to Interlink SQ on the existing State rail line.


The soil men have decided that every transport corridor can be disruptive. So placing together the Toowoomba bypass and the Inland Rail tends to reduce the problem somewhat.

But the ARTC engineers do not seem to like that idea, and the Deputy Prime Minister seems to be going along with them.



Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack



 The proposed forestry corridor from Yelarbon to Cecil Plains then to Wellcamp Airport and Charlton.

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# Wagner backs direct link from port to rail

## TOM GILLESPIE

ONE of the Toowoomba region's most powerful businessmen has backed a call from the Port of Brisbane to complete the final link in the multibillion-dollar Inland Rail project.

Wagner Corporation director Denis Wagner met with POB CEO Roy Cummins this week to discuss the company's planned multimodal freight hub at Wellcamp Airport.

Both men agreed connecting the massive upcoming freight rail project directly to the port was the most efficient way forward, and would result in increased economic activity for the region.

The comments come while the Queensland Government carries out a study into a direct link to the port from Acacia Ridge, where the Inland Rail is currently slated to end, thanks to funding from the Federal Government.

"The majority of the freight on Inland Rail will ultimately go through the port or from the port, so it is important to have an efficient link from the port to Wellcamp," Mr Wagner said.

"If that's a rail link, that's great, or if it's an efficient road link that's fine as well in the short term.

"It doesn't add a lot of value to run the Inland Rail to Acacia Ridge.

"There is no doubt that ef-

ficient and cost-effective freight links are good for re-

gional and state economies."

Mr Cummins, whose company is expected to benefit greatly from a direct link to the port based on the findings of a report by Deloitte Access Economics, said the state would miss out on the benefits if a plan wasn't developed.

"There have been delays, but we're at a point where there is greater corporation between the two levels, particularly with the detailed business case," he said.

"There's been a lot of talk-

ing to this point, so it's very important that we can get behind that business case, get one corridor to the port and have a project that can be seriously discussed.

"The POB has been consistent in the opinion, that we are supportive of Inland Rail but only if it's done correctly.

"Toowoomba is perfectly placed to act as a catchment for those exports and agricultural commodities so they can be moved efficiently to the port."