

3.13 Community Impacts

3.13.1 Community Liaison Group

Prior to the commencement of the project, as required by Condition 10 of the Conditions of Approval, a Community Liaison Group (CLG) was established. This group contained representatives from community and business groups, land owners, representatives from Local Government and special interest groups.

The CLG met monthly for most of the project and later bi-monthly, and discussed a wide range of matters relevant to the highway project. The meetings were routinely attended by the Environmental Management Representative, Abigroup (project managers, engineers, environmental officers, and community liaison personnel), Byron Shire council officers, and RTA representatives. Input from the community members of the CLG was therefore provided directly to the members of the project team with authority to act on concerns and issues.

At each meeting, Abigroup personnel provided the group with detailed updates and briefing, relating to progress of the works and environmental and operational issues of interest. The members were well informed and were able to have direct input into a range of design and construction matters.

The ensuing trust allowed for requests such as after-hours work to be well received, and the community exhibited a high degree of tolerance.

As a participant in the CLG, I observed a very open dialogue which ensured the meetings were an effective mechanism for the two-way flow of information. Community members were quite active in taking issues from the meetings to their wider constituents (and bringing to the group issues from their constituents) and that community members were generally appreciative of the opportunities provided to them for comment and participation.

There was particular interest in a number of the technical presentations relating to design to minimise flooding at Billinudgel and New Brighton/Ocean Shores, landscaping, and noise.

3.13.2 Complaints and Feedback

During the construction phase of the project, Abigroup established a "Community Enquiry/Public Comment Register" that involved the use of a toll-free telephone number that connected directly to Abigroup's Community Relations Officer. The line was available on a 24-hour per day, 7-day basis, with all calls registered and logged on a database (QUESE).

The effectiveness of this system was examined in several audits undertaken during the life of the project. That showed that the majority of complaints/enquiries were provided with an initial response within 24 hrs, with a more detailed response provided (where required) within 10 working days. As at 29 April 2008, all construction issues had been closed-out.

A constraint with the way that the QESE system is used is that valid complaints are not separated from enquiries. Thus an interrogation of construction noise could include both a complaint about noisy equipment and a query on when such equipment will be moving away from a particular area. This needs to be considered with regard to the following summary.

Table 3.3 Summary of main issues from Community Feedback/Complaint Register (QUESE)

| Issue | Number of Complaints/Enquiries |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Noise - operation | 128 |
| Damage | 70 |
| Other | 43 |
| Dust | 42 |
| Working hours | 41 |
| Local roads | 37 |
| Noise – construction | 33 |
| Traffic | 30 |
| Access | 22 |
| Vibration | 12 |
| Flora & Fauna | 5 |

Noise complaints and those regarding noise outside working hours were distributed fairly uniformly throughout the construction period. Some of these related to persons not related to the project, others by parking early, starting machines before start-time, and a couple during night-works associated with the bridge construction. If the individual could be identified, they were spoken to directly, otherwise prompt toolbox meetings were held to remind personnel of their responsibilities.

Damage claims, including those from vibration, were mostly referred to the project insurers.

Following opening of the Upgrade, there were 128 complaints regarding noise from line-marking, tyre noise, and engine exhaust braking. As noted earlier, in spite of compliance with the noise goals, the RTA has removed the profile line-marking from the Upgrade, and installed 'Reduce Engine Braking Noise' signs.

The remaining operational complaints are generally of a minor nature, and the documentation provided indicates that all had been dealt with promptly.