



PO Box 762
Mossman Qld 4873

secretary@dssg.org.au

30 June 2015

Hon Jackie Trad

Minister for Transport

By email: deputy.premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Minister

RE: VEGETATION CLEARANCE CAPTAIN COOK HIGHWAY - SOUTH OF PORT DOUGLAS

I write on behalf of Douglas Shire Sustainability Group, a long standing community group based in Douglas Shire. We wish to express our concern at the extent of current vegetation clearance at the Captain Cook Highway verge south of Port Douglas, in the areas of Mowbray turn off and Yule Point.

I have confirmed this clearing is being undertaken by Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR), as a road safety strategy.

It is not clear that removing vegetation at this rate in these places is justified by any analysis of road safety outcomes.

In this region we rely on the beautiful natural environment as a draw card for visitors and the drive from Cairns on the Captain Cook Highway is part of that draw card.

In our view the extent of the vegetation clearing is excessive - essentially clear felling in some places along the highway at a considerable distance from the road verge – creating an eyesore.

I am advised there are potentially three areas on the route between Cairns and Port Douglas which will be cleared at a similar rate - the distance of clearing from the roadside being determined by the speed limit on the specific section of road. It seems the logic is that removal of all potential hazards within a range (9 metres in this one instance) gives sufficient time for a driver to recover if he or she has lost control of the vehicle travelling at the speed limit for that section of road. I am also advised that the sections of road have been selected based on prior history of loss of life or serious injury arising from a vehicle impacting a hazard (trees in most cases).

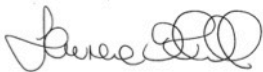
Despite the fact that DTMR has obtained relevant government permits prior to undertaking this work, it has not undertaken any community or local government consultation prior to undertaking this work. Douglas Shire Council advise us that they were not informed or consulted about the work.

There is an amount of community concern about this clearing, particularly of large older trees, and a lack of confidence in the analysis undertaken to justify such extensive clearing. This concern is heightened by a lack of consultation.

We request that your Department undertake community consultation via Douglas Shire Council to assure the community as to how this extent of vegetation clearance will result in safety improvements.

In the meantime we request that DTMR desist from such extensive clearing.

Yours faithfully



Laurene Hull
SECRETARY

Cc: Hon Mark Bailey
Minister for Main Roads, Road Safety and Ports
mainroads@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Cc: Mayor
Douglas Shire Council
Julia.leu@douglas.qld.gov.au

Cc: Hon Billy Gordon
Member for Cook
cook@parliament.qld.gov.au



Minister for Main Roads, Road Safety and Ports
Minister for Energy and Water Supply

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Ms Laurene Hull
Secretary
Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
PO Box 762
MOSSMAN QLD 4873

Level 15 Capital Hill Building
85 George Street Brisbane 4000
GPO Box 2644 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3719 7300
Facsimile +61 7 3224 2493
Email mainroads@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.tmr.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Hull

Thank you for your letter of 30 June 2015 to the Honourable Jackie Trad MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport, Minister for Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and Minister for Trade, about the roadside clearing on the Captain Cook Highway (CCH). As this matter falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Honourable Mark Bailey MP, your letter was forwarded to Minister Bailey for consideration and response. The Minister has asked that I respond on his behalf.

I note Douglas Shire Sustainability Group's concern about the extent of the vegetation clearing in the CCH road reserve. This highway is both an iconic, world-renowned Queensland tourist route and a vital road link for local residents, small businesses and transport operators. Between Palm Cove and Port Douglas, the CCH is used by almost 6000 vehicles per day, including about 540 heavy vehicles. Between 2006 and 2011, there were 18 crashes within the three sections where the roadside clearing took place. This included eight hospitalisations.

For the period 2008–12, serious casualties from run-off-road crashes accounted for 30 per cent of all Queensland's serious casualties. A previous detailed analysis of run-off-road crashes in Queensland by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR), for the period 2000–08, identified that the most frequently hit roadside object that resulted in serious casualties were trees. Other roadside objects identified in the analysis included utility poles, embankments, culverts and guardrails.

The road works are being funded through the Palaszczuk Government's Safer Roads Sooner – Roadside Hazard Mass Action Program. Safer Roads Sooner is all about improving road safety through high-benefit, cost-effective, road engineering treatments at known and potential crash locations. This is a statewide program. In Far North district the work is being carried out on the Bruce Highway, the Kennedy Highway and the CCH.

The removal of road side hazards significantly reduces the risk of a severe crash when a driver loses control and leaves the road. Based on road safety research, a minimum distance from the edge of the traffic lane has been established for a driver to be able to regain control of a vehicle in the event of an incident. The clearing distance is based on the speed limit. The clearing distance for an 80km/h speed limit is six metres. For a 100km/h speed limit it is nine metres.

I am advised the works involve the removal of boulders, stumps, saplings and mature trees which pose a potential hazard and, where appropriate, the use of barriers to shield hazards.

I am further advised the clearing took place on three sections of the road reserve totalling 10.8 kilometres and is now complete. These sections are located outside the Wet Tropics World Heritage areas. Site assessments were completed in accordance with environmental and cultural heritage obligations. The assessments determined that no endangered, vulnerable or near threatened species are expected in the clear zone and, should these be present, no significant residual impact is expected.

TMR received approval for the work from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the work was carried out in compliance with the *Nature Conservation (Wildlife Management) Regulation 2006*.

TMR consulted with the Queensland Police Service to help locate the owners of a memorial located 950 metres south of Redcliff Point. The memorial is attached to a tree that needs to be removed as part of the works.

The Minister took your comments on board about Douglas Shire Council (DSC) and I can advise that TMR has since written to DSC with advice about the need for the works. He has also instructed his department to ensure that the relevant local government authority is consulted as a matter of course in these situations in the future.

Thank you for bringing this matter to the attention of the Minister.

Yours sincerely



**DENISE SPINKS
CHIEF OF STAFF**