

SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE DELIVERY OF THE INLAND RAIL
PROGRAMME.

I strongly object to this Project in its current form.

My name is Helen Hunt, and I live on the property "██████████" at what the ARTC are erroneously calling the Black Hollow sub-section of the N2N Section of the proposed Inland Rail route. The area known here as "Black Hollow" is several kilometres on toward Baradine. What they are calling "Black Hollow" is in fact known as "Brigalow" and has been identified on maps for years as such.

The line is proposed to travel along several hundred metres of my boundary fence a little south of where the originally proposed Black Hollow crossing loop was to be.

My grandfather was the first settler to take up this land about 1870. After my father died, my husband Wally and I took over the farm, running a grazing and cropping enterprise. There is no permanent water on the property, so we are totally dependent on sub-artesian bores for stock and homestead water. We also have a larger property near to ██████████ (which happily is not impacted by the line), which is also cropping and cattle. This means constant travel between the two properties. My husband died in 2019, so now there is just me.

My property ██████████ is on the plains a few kilometres west of the Warrumbungle Mountains, so I have had many years witnessing the effects of the water from the Warrumbungle watershed as it races down the non-permanent creeks that run through ██████████. No doubt exacerbated by farming, the track the water takes can subtly change with each gully-raker, leaving hugely eroded land and washed away fences in its wake.

Although the proposed line only runs a few hundred metres through my property, this is along a boundary fence and exactly where two large creeks converge. One of them is the Calawari Creek, and the other is unnamed. Normally dry, huge amounts of water flow very swiftly down both these creeks after storms. It would be difficult to think of a less suitable place for a railway line.

The fact that the route selection bypasses the town of Coonamble is by far my main objection to the current alignment of the Inland Rail.

My Submission addresses the first three themes of the guideline questions.

1. ARTC governance and management arrangements for the delivery of the Inland Rail Programme
2. The role of Inland Rail in meeting Australia's growing freight task and providing a Service Offering to meet freight sector needs.
3. The processes for the selection and refinement of the Inland Rail route and

whether the processes are fit-for-purpose, including consideration of benefits and impacts.

ARTC's governance and management is patently inadequate, as is demonstrated by their failure to consider different route alignment options, their total disregard of local knowledge and concerns expressed by landholders, especially regarding hydrology, and can only be rectified by a complete reversal of their blinkered approach to the Project.

The perception is that the construction of the Inland Rail line is solely to transport general freight, (the oft quoted "fridge"), between Brisbane and Melbourne. In fact, it will give access to the transportation of many other freight categories, enabling the towns and communities on the route to reap huge benefits in freight savings and connectivity to cities and ports. The tonnes of freight generated in inland NSW must not be under-estimated in the big picture, and this is the opportunity for Inland Rail to provide a service offering to meet all the freight sector needs.

Parkes, Narromine, and Narrabri are examples of towns on the existing line which are embracing Inland Rail for this reason.

The current proposed alignment bypasses Coonamble, instead cutting a swathe of destruction through extremely productive agricultural land. In many cases the line bisects farms, making it dangerous and difficult, if not impossible, to continue farming or grazing. This is one important area where the processes of Inland Rail to select a route that is fit-for-purpose, including consideration of benefits and impacts, are non-existent.

The town of Coonamble is the grain receival centre for one of the largest and most productive grain growing areas in the state of NSW. In the 20/21 grain harvest, Grain Corp in Coonamble processed 434,000 tonnes of wheat, the most at an individual centre in the state.

If the Inland Rail route were to stay on the existing line via Coonamble, the savings in freight costs would be considerable, and the resulting connectivity an incentive for the growth of business in the town and region.

If the Inland Rail were to bypass Coonamble, as the proposed alignment does, it would relegate this very large productive district to a second- class region which will struggle to prosper. It is an insult to the people who live in the town, (and surrounding smaller towns), and the farmers in the district who are currently struggling with prohibitive freight costs, while at the same time producing an enormous tonnage of grain. The costs of producing a crop are escalating each year, and the freight savings that would be possible with direct access to the Inland Rail line would be a huge boost to encouraging farmers, and especially young farmers, to stay in the industry. The savings in freight would not apply only to transporting the grain to port, but incoming commodities, such as chemical, which is a huge cost in growing a crop. And indeed, to most of the goods and supplies consumed in Coonamble, which would encourage business and

prosperity.

The Coonamble Shire submitted a very comprehensive and compelling document in reply to the EIS, recommending an alternative alignment via Coonamble.

Not since the conception of the Inland Rail has a socio-economic study been done to properly assess the cost benefits of keeping the alignment on the existing line via Coonamble. And despite the representations of the Coonamble Shire, and many individuals, in reply to the EIS, ARTC have failed to produce any evidence supporting this route selection. Where is the economic analysis the ARTC say has been done?

The two reasons given by ARTC to support the decision to bypass Coonamble remain the same.

- **Time.**

The line has no beginning or end, at either Brisbane or Melbourne, so freight must be off loaded onto trucks (creating more congestion on the roads) to be transported to warehouses in both cities. The time on the railway line becomes irrelevant.

- **Cheaper.**

I am sure it would be a relatively straight forward exercise for someone with appropriate qualifications to assess the cost of upgrading an existing line which would be reasonably accurate, allowing for continuing inflation of costs, and other calculable contingencies.

As I read through the PIR I see new bridges, new culverts, borrow pits kilometres from the line, every metre of it has to be built from scratch on virgin land, bores that have to be drilled to unknown depths to get water for construction and then carted to the site, new level crossings, new roads, fencing, hills that have to be cut into, hollows that need to be built up, Shire roads that have to be brought to a sufficient standard to carry the traffic to get to the alignment to build the line, public road closures and new ones built, and all of this is still subject to consultation!

And I haven't even mentioned the enormous and still unknown costs of land acquisition.

Nor of compensation, relocation and rebuilds of property. And the constantly mentioned mitigation. Everything is going to be "mitigated", but rarely are we told how.

How is it possible to put a figure on all this nebulous expenditure and say it is cheaper than upgrading an existing line?

Where are the detailed costings to justify bypassing Coonamble on the basis that the Greenfield option is cheaper? Are there any accurate and detailed figures on the N2N Section available for public scrutiny? The processes used to select this route, taking into

account the benefits or impacts on the community appear to be non-existent.

As ARTC are planning on the alignment coming through this Greenfield section, I would like to bring to your attention the impacts such a decision would have in this area. ARTC have failed to properly consider the consequences of this decision.

My main concerns are:

- hydrology,
- scouring and soil erosion of vulnerable and totally unsuitable soils,
- water required for construction, and
- fencing.

When the existing railway line to Coonamble was built, it was very cleverly constructed on the Castlereagh River watershed, (in this context, a ridge of land separating water flowing in different directions) without impacting on waterflows. Engineers (and Governments) were very smart back then.

This proposed alignment is perpendicular to the Warrumbungle watershed (in this context, what rainwater does after it falls on the land), crossing the creeks on the plains below the mountains where they are at their peak velocity after storms. This gives rise to the possibility of the railway line becoming a dam wall, backing up water onto main roads and into paddocks. As one small example, the proposed bridges and culverts on my boundary would never cope with the amount of water that comes down the creeks at their peak.

The hydrology assessment report in the PIR has focused on the flooding around Narrabri and Narromine, and clearly has not addressed the problem in this area. The Table of Catchment/ Watercourses severely underestimates both the upstream catchment area of the creeks and the flow type.

Contrary to their statement in the PIR, the Greenfield section in this area is traversing large areas of unstable, soft alluvial soils, much of it over hills! We are very familiar with the constant erosion that takes place after heavy falls of rain. No studies have been carried out on the soils in this area. The desktop assessment of this area is one of “basalt mesa plains, dispersive sodic soils with gullying and vertosols”. The authors of a report on the studies carried out found that

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“Erosion threshold velocities should be reviewed by a geotechnical engineer and soil/ erosion specialist (geomorphologist) as part of the detailed design”.

The threat to our underground water is terrifying and is being side-stepped by ARTC. In this area we are all totally dependent on sub-artesian water for stock and household purposes. Any lowering of the water table would be catastrophic, and I do not use the word lightly. Enormous amounts of water are required during construction, yet this is never mentioned by ARTC, and

glossed over when questions were asked at CCC meetings. In the PIR they talk about bores and mitigating drawdowns, and should be and maybe but I cannot find a map of where these bores are, or are going to be, or any definite details of depth or flow or how much water required from each bore. This is not good enough and most alarming. We could be left without water if the water level drops below our pumps down the bores. It is imperative that this lack of detail is properly and promptly addressed.

The mind boggles at the disruption and traffic hazards during construction with water and ballast having to be brought here from kilometres away. Accessing the construction site, and areas used as storage dumps are other causes of concern. How will they “mitigate” all that?

Fencing is my personal last concern. What are they going to do with my boundary fence when it is full of fiddly little culverts? How are they going to maintain this fence after the creek comes down? How are they going to fence the line anyway and keep it stockproof? The fence along the line must be their responsibility, and theirs alone. Another ongoing expense they may not have factored in.

In my opinion, the concept of building a new railway line, intended to facilitate the passage of multiple, very long, very fast trains every day, through productive farms in this closely settled prime agricultural land, is absurd, irresponsible, soul-destroying to those impacted, and downright stupid. There is already an existing line that just needs upgrading, via Coonamble, which if used, will bring ongoing prosperity to the town and district.

I believe the original precipitous decision made years ago to bulldoze the line through what was considered “the shortest route”, was in fact a knee-jerk reaction to the single-minded greed of big business and the egotistical ambition of Government Ministers. It was conceived and executed on a desktop. It did not consider the adverse implications involved in this decision, nor the advantages to towns and districts by following the existing railway line.

I also believe that Government and business have now realized that it is imperative, if this is indeed a “Nation Building Project”, that every dollar of the billions and billions it is going to take to build, must be maximized. And the way to do that is to create the infrastructure which will enable all of NSW to prosper and benefit from the investment, not just a select few areas.

I would like to congratulate the Federal Government on honouring its pre-election commitment to hold an Independent Review into the delivery of the Inland Rail Programme. Thank you.

May I urge, in the strongest possible terms, this Review to take this opportunity to right the wrongs of the past, and direct ARTC to put the Greenfield Section on hold, and revisit the longer term economic, social, and environmental benefits that an alternative route via Coonamble would generate.

Thank you.

Helen Hunt.

Submitted by:

