

Independent Review of the delivery of the Inland Rail Program

Richard Shepherd



Submission may be made public

In relation to the review, I would like to address issues raised in your Terms of Reference in relation to:

- The Inland Rail route
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement.

[REDACTED] and extends approximately 6km south/north along my eastern boundary encompassing a passing loop.

The Inland Rail Route

From my initial contact with the ARTC I have expressed concerns regarding flooding along this route. The above land, situated west of the Warrumbungle Mountains along the Warrumbungle Watershed, is a flood plain subject to flooding in wet times and unsuitable for development impacted by east/west water flows. Until recently, the ARTC have dismissed concerns regarding flooding, stating that any issues would be addressed in the design of the track, which has not yet reached its "final design draft". In April 2022, I met with ARTC officers, at their request, to discuss what they referred to as "drainage options to address water flows". Strategies proposed by the ARTC were vague and I have no confidence, at this stage, that the ARTC has adequately addressed issues to prevent ponding on the eastern side of the proposed track and gouging on the western side of the track. Also, I believe that the placement, and limited number of proposed culverts, will alter the natural water flows across the land, having a negative effect, especially in cropping paddocks. I need definitive information on culverts so I can work out impacts and need the opportunity to **provide input in the context of my local knowledge**. It is not dramatic to state that unless issues relevant to flooding in the Warrumbungle Watershed area are adequately addressed, there is potential for flooding to **undermine the track** and cause **widespread damage across wide areas of highly productive farmland**.

One of the disadvantages of a greenfield route for the Inland Rail (essential, we have been told to meet the 24 hour Melbourne to Brisbane deadline) is its **ecological impact**. Such is the destruction of 6.5ha of Weeping Myall Woodland. This stand is the remnant of a much larger stand and has been conserved by family ownership over decades. It is in good condition on an historically lightly grazed and uncropped sight. It is visually beautiful, especially in Spring when the native understory is flowering. A significant number of these trees will be lost to track construction and their loss will endanger the survival of remaining trees. The stand will be fragmented by Inland Rail infrastructure and be vulnerable to

impact from invasive species, pollutants, adjacent activity relevant to line construction and potential changes to water flows.

The Narromine to Narrabri Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (Part 3 of 3) states that:

"within NSW the Weeping Myall Woodlands have declined from an estimated original extent between 1,900,000 and 3,300,000 hectares to a current extent of between 190,000 and 330,000 hectares (Benson 2006)"

and "that much of the remaining Weeping Myall Woodland is in very poor condition."

Considering the increase in cropping since 2006 and that Weeping Myalls occur on highly fertile soil, the threat to this species has no doubt significantly increased since that time.

There is also a concern regarding wildlife connectivity in the northern end of the property. Kangaroos for example (while not a threatened species) are always in the area, moving through to the east towards the Warrumbungle Mountains, especially in dry times. I have expressed concern, during meetings with the ARTC, that the railway line will form a barrier to this migration pattern and needs to be addressed in their planning.

Stakeholder consultation and engagement

As a stakeholder, consultation and engagement with the ARTC has been ad hoc and frustrating. Over the past five years frequent staff changes have affected continuity. Communication has often been difficult: emails unanswered, telephone calls not returned, staff with little understanding of rural practice, and decisions made by the ARTC without consultation/information leading to a complete **lack of trust.**

In 2020 the ARTC designated a passing loop to be placed on my land. I found this out when told by a Councillor from Gilgandra Shire early 2021. Following contact to the media criticising ARTC communication, I was contacted by an engagement officer and told that a passing loop would not involve the acquisition of further land. However, later information has indicated that the passing loop does require further land and this will involve further destruction of the stand of Weeping Myall Woodland, an endangered species. As a result, the 3.5 ha. originally being impacted has become 6.5 ha. of what is a threatened ecological community.

At no time has the ARTC sought my input or enabled/promoted the development of a stakeholder working relationship.