

8th March, 2019

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Environmental and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Chair and Committee,

PETITION NO. 105 – ALTERNATIVE BUNBURY OUTER RING ROAD

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee regarding the Alternative Bunbury Outer Ring Road (BORR). This petition has been driven by passionate residents and stakeholders who vehemently believe that newly proposed alternative southern route of the BORR (marked on maps as the 'green' route) will have catastrophic environmental, agricultural, economic and social impacts.

The original designated southern section 'red' alignment (that consists of land planned and earmarked for the route for decades) could now be replaced with the newly proposed 'green' southern route, meaning that the BORR would tear through precious wetlands, natural bush and productive farmlands. A previous environmental study on the 'green' alternative route deemed the wetlands and banksia woodlands too valuable to be destroyed, and that the 'red' southern alignment would have less impact. Unfortunately, this study and previous EPA reports against the 'green' alternative BORR route are now being ignored.

Instead, new environmental studies have been hurriedly commissioned. These studies seem to have been done to merely 'tick the box' and the results are questionable, particularly given that they were rushed and done at the wrong time of year, with limited, inconsistent areas of wetlands and properties included in the study. There is also community concern over the incorrect documentation of findings and the lack of disclosure of data collected.

Wetlands play a critical role in our natural environment, they are aquatic nurseries crucial to the survival of native fauna and flora. Preserving our precious wetlands is an important international obligation. Dr Michael Cootes works in the wetlands section of the Department of Conservation Biodiversity and Attractions (DBCA) acknowledges the importance of the 'green' route wetlands and has started the process of upgrading the area so that they become recognised as nationally important wetlands.

The BORR would alter the habitat of existing wildlife and plants in the pristine wetlands, causing habitat fragmentation and degradation. The banksia woodlands are home to many species of rare orchards, native and rare fungus. The wetland areas have a diverse but vulnerable variety of fauna, including the endangered black stripe minnow fish (the 4th remnant population known in the world that cannot be relocated), blue-spot goby, frogs, critically endangered ring tail possum, brushtail possums, phascogales, threatened red-tailed Carnaby cockatoo, falcons, wedge-tailed eagles, white tailed cockatoos and many native water birds.

If the alternative route proceeds, waterflow in an extensive area will be permanently affected, as the formations of draining and flooding will be destroyed. Overtime, the water quality will degrade the surrounding habitat, creating a barren saline wasteland.

The 'green' route is characterised by a large expanse of low-lying clay and acid sulphate soils. The disruption of the area's water hydrology by the BORR would affect water flow from the flood plains, increasing the risk of acid sulphate soil disturbance. This could be catastrophic to the primary producers of the area. The potential for disruption of the commercial production of beef, lamb, cow and goat milk, avocados, strawberries, blueberries, plums, apricots, nectarines, peaches, wine grapes, olives, compost, pasture seed and fodder would have significant economic and food security impacts on the region.

The proposed BORR will facilitate the spread of plant and animal invasive species and increase chemical, noise and light pollutants encroaching on the wetland environment and farming properties. Animal mortalities from fauna crossing on the main thoroughfare will also cause a further decline in populations.

Significantly, our questions to Main Roads regarding the massive volume of sand that will be needed to build the new route and where that sand would come from have not been answered. There is a real risk of further environmental impact caused securing the massive amount of back fill required to build the BORR in such an unsuitable area.

The community is frustrated with the inadequacy of the consultation process. Landholders and industry groups alike feel that there has not been enough genuine consultation. Many locals have also expressed their opinion that two major roads running parallel with each other, just a couple hundred of metres apart, can only be from rushed and improperly thought out planning.

Please keep in mind that thirty-one landholders and their families are under severe stress from this threat to their homes and livelihoods. There is a genuine culture of stewardship in the local community, including many people whose families have lived in this place for generations. People's identities are entwined with the sense of place that has been developed in the community and they believe they have a real obligation to look after the land. As one long-time resident put it, 'Being able to pass on our sustainable rural and historical agricultural roots and sense of community to the next generation is surely what it is all about'.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the 'green' route is three times longer than the original 'red' route and would come at significantly higher costs to the taxpayer.

For the sake of our community, I urge the committee to seriously consider these matters.

Yours sincerely

Chris Scott