

INTEGRATED ANALYSIS PTY LTD

# Community Advocate Monthly Report No.1

---

Gerringong upgrade; Princes Highway

Rowena Lennings

June, 2012

Report from the Community Advocate for the Gerringong upgrade process outlining objectives, and detailing activities and outcomes.

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Scope of role.....	3
3. Objectives .....	3
4. Activities and outcomes since 14.5.12 .....	4
Objective 1. Visibility and accessibility .....	4
Activities and outcomes: .....	4
Objective 2. Clarification of role.....	5
Activities and outcomes .....	5
Activities and outcomes: .....	5
Objective 4. Issues resolution .....	7
5. Recommendations going forward.....	8
6. Next report.....	8

# 1. Introduction

For the first time Roads and Maritime Services has created the position of community advocate on an infrastructure development project. This innovative role has been developed and resourced in consultation with interested residents of Gerringong. The role is being piloted on the Gerringong upgrade project, with a view to extending it to additional components of the Princes Highway upgrade.

The community advocate has been appointed and commenced work on 14.5.12. A press release announcing the appointment was issued on 16.5.12.

This report is the first of regular monthly reports from the community advocate.

## 2. Scope of role

The community advocate is independent of the Gerringong upgrade project team. The main functions of the role are to:

- Support people who are unsure about RMS and project processes by providing advice and an independent view.
- Assist people to raise their issues with the project team and support them in technical discussions.
- Work with the Gerringong community to advise if the project's community involvement plan is working for them.

## 3. Objectives

A specific set of objectives have been identified as follows. These objectives are likely to be refined and change as the project progresses. In this project start-up phase it is particularly important to:

- Achieve visibility and be easily accessible.
- Clarify the advocate's role with the community and assist in building awareness of contractor's complaint and enquiry management process.
- Develop an informed understanding of community issues/history.
- Contribute and/or work towards issue resolution.

## 4. Activities and outcomes since 14.5.12

### Objective 1. Visibility and accessibility

Creating awareness of the role and being accessible to a range of people with different needs and preferred methods of contact is the first and most critical step towards providing a useful service to the people of Gerringong. The following list identifies the activities that have taken place and outcomes achieved over the past two months.

#### Activities and outcomes:

##### Meetings/briefings:

- Member for Kiama, Gareth Ward MP.
- Mayor of Kiama and elected representatives of Kiama Council.
- Members of the PHASE community activist group.
- Local business owners and operators (Fern Street).
- Local residents at the community information days recently organised by the Gerringong upgrade project team.
- Interview with local journalist.

##### Printed and electronic information materials:

A number of information tools have been developed in order to widely disseminate contact details and provide a range of ways that people can contact the community advocate:

- Web page on RMS project website.
- Description of role and contact details in community update distributed in May to 1600 local businesses and residents.
- Press release issued by local MP.
- Description of advocate's role and contact details on posters at community information day attended by approximately 150 people.

##### Media coverage

Media coverage below focused on the appointment of the community advocate.

- 30.5.12 Interview with community advocate.

<http://www.kiamaindependent.com.au/news/local/news/general/new-contact-for-highway-upgrade-help/2572723.aspx>

- 23.5.12 Interview with Fern Street business owners regarding road closure, mentions role of community advocate. MP urges concerned business owners to contact him or the community advocate.

<http://www.kiamaindependent.com.au/news/local/news/general/keep-town-vibrant-during-work/2564750.aspx?storypage=2>

NB: Ongoing media coverage is not anticipated as the advocate is not able to speak on behalf of the project or give interviews on current or previous issues.

## **Objective 2. Clarification of role**

One of the challenges of the advocate's role is not to duplicate or to cause confusion regarding the responsibility of the contractor, Fulton Hogan, in conducting community liaison. The role of the advocate is to provide advice and support where necessary to community members on how best to access project information and the project team.

### **Activities and outcomes**

One of the indirect consequences of raising the public profile of the community advocate has been some confusion with the community regarding the community advocate and the contractor's community liaison manager's role. To date, five people have contacted the community advocate to obtain information that could be better provided by the contractor's Community Liaison Manager. A flow chart is currently in development to assist the community understand these differing roles and responsibilities.

## **Objective 3. Develop an informed understanding of community issues**

The following list itemises the activities undertaken in order to develop a detailed understanding of the issues, views and desired outcomes of the affected community.

### **Activities and outcomes:**

- Reviewed project documentation including Review of Environmental Factors Submissions Report 2010.

- Obtained access to the project data base (Consultation Manager) that contains the history of all contacts with the project team and registers all contacts and complaints.
- Toured the upgrade route with a local resident who provided a personal perspective on the historic issues and their current status.
- Conversations with local business owners and visitors to the community information day.
- Met with Southern Region Manager to understand his perspective of the history of the project and issues.
- Informal contact with RMS and Fulton Hogan project team representatives.

The following is a list of issues raised with the community advocate to date. They include:

1. A high level of interest in the **landscaping** plan, concern that views and sun should not be blocked, also not to over plant in high wind areas.
2. Concerns about **loss of business revenue**. Businesses in Gerringong are experiencing hardship in the current economic climate. The major concern of business owners is a further reduction of revenue from loss of passing trade during the upgrade. The two elements of this concern are that firstly, traffic disruption on the highway (and unfavourable traffic reports on Sydney radio) will discourage day trippers from Sydney and secondly, potential day time closures of Fern Street would make it hard for people to reach them. By attending a meeting of business owners I was able to explain the current consultation process and reassure business owners that it was not the project team's intention to close Fern Street during high traffic volume periods.
3. Concern about **individual access, property adjustments** and location of **link roads**. These matters have required activities related to conflict resolution and are detailed in the following section.
4. A number of **positive comments** have been received about the project, Fulton Hogan's performance to date and the creation of the community advocate role. They are best captured by the following comments:

*Great initiative. You certainly have an interesting job.*

*Fulton Hogan have been trying really hard to work with the community, and have a great problem solving approach to managing their impacts*

*Really encouraged by having the chance to ask questions and to find out more during design phase, when things can still be adjusted.*

## **Objective 4. Issues resolution**

### **Activities and outcomes:**

#### **1. Concerns over safety of access from individual properties to the upgraded highway**

To date, four property owners have requested the community advocate look into issues that they believe have not been resolved to their satisfaction. The community advocate is employing the following steps to understand the issues and identify possible remedies.

- Review of the documentation relating to the complaints and any supporting materials.
- Meeting with complainants to fully appreciate their concerns.
- Discussions with other interested parties as required, if they are willing.
- Preparation of a report with recommendations.

#### **2. Objection to the noise wall**

A group of residents whose properties front the noise wall are upset about the visual impact of the wall and are worried it may exacerbate the noise from trains. The community advocate's initial response was that the noise wall is part of the approved project and therefore not a negotiable element, however the community advocate will meet with residents to explain the approval process and discuss their ongoing concerns.

#### **3. Concern over loss of pedestrian access from property and other matters**

The issues raised by property owners and their context are being investigated.

#### **4. Concerns with previous access design review process and documentation thereof.**

Initial report has been provided; some items are pending further clarification.

#### **5. Concerns with property adjustment**

- Telephone conversations and a meeting with landowners on 25.5.12 to discuss their concerns regarding elements of the detailed design including batter slope, drainage and landscaping.
- Attended meeting with landowners, RMS and Fulton Hogan representatives on 14.6.12. Revised design has addressed owners concerns.

- Community advocate noted issues and agreements at meeting and will close out this matter once final sign-off has taken place.

## **5. Recommendations going forward**

### **1. Communication in relation to the property acquisition process**

A resident has raised concerns about the RMS property acquisition process. His viewpoint is that the RMS process does not properly accommodate the potential impact on property owners. He has proposed that an introduction and explanation of the property acquisition process by an independent person, not directly involved in the property acquisition and valuation process, has many potential benefits.

An initial discussion with RMS property officers was held. Their view was that an independent person in this role would duplicate rather than add value to the process. They pointed out that the the whole community of potentially affected residents was already briefed at public meetings about the process during the route selection process, before the route was confirmed.

The next step is to contact a number of landowners and key stakeholders and ask for their input about their experience and their suggestions regarding improvement to communication activities surrounding the property acquisition process. Presuming this exercise yields useful suggestions, I propose to offer to facilitate a discussion with concerned RMS property and project management officers and landowners. This discussion would focus on identifying strengths and weaknesses of the current process, capturing lessons learnt and identifying areas for improvement.

## **6. Next report**

The next report will be issued at the end of August 2012 due to the community advocate taking leave from mid-July until mid-August 2012. During this time calls to the community advocate will be answered by a message service.