

Assistant Director – Inland Rail Review Secretariat
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

11th November 2022

Dear Dr. Schott,

Thank for you the opportunity to provide comments on the independent review of Inland Rail.

I am a farmer from the [REDACTED] area, and I have also been previously involved in many aspects of advocacy and policy work on Inland Rail. My property is not directly impacted, but for over 6 years I have represented many landholders who are impacted by the botched Inland Rail Project in all areas of the alignment in NSW, but particularly within the greenfield sections of track being North Star to Border, Narromine to Narrabri and Stockinbingal to Illabo.

The matter of Inland Rail is something that I have been wholeheartedly engaged in from its very inception. I have sat at tables with ARTC senior representatives, including the CEO and the Acting CEO, a range of government Minister's at both a state and federal level and numerous meetings with Deputy Prime Minister's. I have hosted parliamentary committees and taken part in many and varied media opportunities to try to get this project to where it needs to be.

The reason I have invested countless hours of volunteer time into this project, is because I could see the massive potential for agriculture to benefit, and also for my local community of Coonamble to benefit, as long as the project was executed correctly. Sadly, it has been a disaster since day 1.

I now despair at the current state of project in NSW. Inland Rail has degenerated into a development that is going to cost the taxpayers of Australia over \$20 billion on the latest estimates, to move fridges and other containerised goods between Melbourne and the outskirts of Brisbane. The benefits to landholders in my community are virtually non-existent, and many of them wear the costs with an unproven greenfield route being doggedly pursued across their productive farmland, when there are other proven routes.

I note the themes that you have asked for feedback on, and I have done my best to provide some high-level commentary on these below:

Theme 1: ARTC governance and management arrangements for the delivery of the Inland Rail Program.

- ***How could ARTC improve its management arrangements and structures to better facilitate the delivery of the Inland Rail Program?***

Management at ARTC and specifically Inland Rail has always been ever-changing, which causes major issues. Even now, we have an Acting CEO, instead of someone that is willing to take on the responsibility for all aspects of the project delivery and provide full and frank feedback to government on the white elephant that the project has become.

At the landholder end, farmers are used to dealing with a new person just about every time they come into contact with ARTC. There appears to be no central database that records historical issues and information. Landholders tell their story again and again and again to a revolving door of personnel, whilst never receiving answers to questions asked and continually being told that they are being forced to negotiation in relation to compulsory acquisition of land. To boot, they are then told that their legal costs "might" be paid if ARTC deem them to be "reasonable". It's offensive in the extreme.

I believe that the management at Inland Rail see their role as one where they doggedly pursue an idealised project plan, and when they are asked legitimate questions, to dodge and avoid answering the questions wherever possible. It has been like this for literally years. There is no doubt in my mind that the Inland Rail have a massive cultural issue within their organisation and it needs immediate steps taken to address.

2: The role of Inland Rail in meeting Australia's growing freight task and providing a Service Offering to meet freight sector needs.

- ***How could Inland Rail and access to intermodal terminals create new opportunities and benefits for your region/industry/community?***

Access to Inland Rail is critical if it is to be a success. Unfortunately for my area, and many other areas, there is no access. In my case, this is in a region that regularly delivers 700, 000 tonnes of grain to local receival sites annually. We as a community have been told by Inland Rail to give up on advocating for the use of existing corridors (which would also then service the largest grain growing area of the state) because going via Coonamble and using existing rail corridors would add anywhere between 4-12 minutes of travel time (depending on whose calculations you rely upon). It is patently absurd. We have an existing corridor that will not be used, a community that is begging for the Inland Rail project to assist their town and we are being told that it cant happen as the container coming from

Melbourne has to rush to get to a depot on the outskirts of Brisbane in under 24 hours, where it will sit untouched for possibly days. We have never once, been given the evidence to support this ridiculous 24 hour claim, but it has been repeatedly put forward as a reason as to why we should stop asking for a route review.

Additionally, ARTC have never conducted a cost-benefit analysis north of Cumborah. There were a range of route options considered in some Multi-Criteria Analyses in 2016 and the logic applied was that if the numbers didn't stack up as far north as Cumborah, then they wouldn't work for Coonamble. What this fails (obviously) to take into account is the massive BENEFIT that having an intermodal in Coonamble would have for this region, and the state more broadly.

3: The processes for the selection and refinement of the Inland Rail route and whether these processes are fit-for-purpose, including consideration of benefits and impacts.

- ***Do you consider ARTC's approach to engaging communities on the route is fit-for-purpose?***
- ***How could ARTC improve its engagement with communities and stakeholders along the route in regard to the processes used to consider benefits and impacts?***

As mentioned above, genuine route alternatives are never properly and fully considered. I believe this is because of a stubborn and ego-driven approach taken by Inland Rai, and relevant government Ministers over time, to not appear to have "made a mistake" when it comes to route. There is no engagement with communities on route. Even now, representative organisations try to engage with ARTC in a mediation (that I understand has been watered down to a facilitation), ARTC repeatedly state that they will not talk about the route. That would be fine if they could provide the evidence to support the route they have chosen but they can't!

4: The effectiveness of ARTC's community and stakeholder engagement processes, and opportunities for improvement, including ARTC's approach to addressing community concerns.

- ***What has ARTC done well in engaging with communities, including addressing community concerns?***
- ***In what ways could ARTC improve its communication and engagement processes with communities and stakeholders?***
- ***How could ARTC improve its engagement with communities and stakeholders in responding to concerns?***

What has ARTC done well? Really nothing to be honest. Frankly, I am tired of trying to tell ARTC how they should improve their stakeholder

engagement. At the end of the day, they do not have any real intention to genuinely engage. They do it to tick a box and that is it. If they want to really get serious about this then go back to the drawing board, do the actual work such as the cost-benefit analyses that communities have been crying out for years for. They should stop trying to convince everyone that there can be absolutely no change to the route because they don't want to take the time to consider feedback or change, or don't want to appear as though they have made a mistake. They need to be flexible and really listen. There are many people like me that really want to see Inland Rail succeed, but cannot support what they see currently.

In conclusion, and as mentioned, I have been involved in this matter for a long time, and provided a lot of feedback on a range of issues. Due to harvest pressures, it has been challenging for me to get this submission into a form that extensively covers the matters that you seek feedback on. I would be however, very happy to take part in any further consultation you may be undertaking if you deem it appropriate.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments and feedback.

Regards,

Adrian Lyons

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