

Public Works Inquiry into the state controlled roads from Birdsville to Bedourie and Birdsville to Windorah

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My name is Jenna Brook and I own and operate the two service stations in town, which in addition to providing fuel, also supply groceries, postal services and automotive repairs. As a business owner who relies on the road network for delivery of critical supplies, I am grateful for this opportunity to provide some additional insight for **this** public hearing.

Connection, in all its forms, throughout regional and remote areas underpins the sustainability of these communities and allows us to live a life of relative convenience, somewhat similar to that of our coastal cousins. Now whilst I am fully aware that we may not hold the same power in terms of votes garnered, I do believe that we punch above our weight when it comes to natural resources, tourism and agriculture.

I have spent most of my 36 years living in Birdsville and it still astounds me that we do not have a fully sealed access road from any direction.

Living in this reality, we understand that freight costs are likely to be higher with transport companies having to navigate dirt roads, that sometimes supplies might be delayed due to road conditions, and that in some cases it might be many weeks, or indeed months between resupplies.

And whilst we certainly understand that mother nature often cuts off many communities throughout Queensland, the difference is that **our roads do not require extreme weather events** to be closed.

It's not the one in fifty-year flooding event or the one in one hundred year storm that we are here to talk about.

It's the fact that **ten to twenty millimeters** of rain can seriously impact on supply chains.

In 2023 Birdsville should not continue to be held ransom by the weather.

Local businesses shouldn't need to be concerned that a small amount of rainfall is going to result in cancelled bookings, running out of fuel, food going to waste, or supplies not getting here.

An example of this is that in 2022 I was left with seven pallets of ice after the Birdsville Races, when the supply truck had to turn around at Windorah due to a very small section of the road being closed after rain. After making a long detour, by the time it arrived most of the visitors in town had left. Not even considering all the fresh produce that went to waste, I don't think you need to be a rocket scientist to work out that a town of 100 won't use 1365 bags of ice before the bill is due.

While there is no doubt that we have developed skills and processes for dealing with this uncertainty, I for one would be pleased to be rid of this added challenge in

operating a remote business, and be able to focus more on building business and providing locals and visitors with a better experience.

After all, tourism is what sustains the Birdsville community, and while the town may survive without it, it certainly won't thrive.

As a business owner I am looking for ways to make Birdsville a year round destination, and while the idea of encouraging travelers to visit in summer may sound ludicrous, the fact remains that in order for business to survive in these towns we need more than a 5 month window for generating revenue.

With most of Australia's population living between **Brisbane and Melbourne**, it makes sense that the easiest access route for most of these visitors is going to be via Windorah, and if we want to see Birdsville and the towns along the way benefit, then we need to be looking at the **crucial role that road conditions play** in ensuring people are confident to make plans to visit.

If the local community and visitors can have this confidence in access, then our ability to plan for the future, attract more residents, and to invest in the infrastructure required to **serve a growing** customer base, will ultimately ensure that towns like Birdsville remain viable and thriving for the next generation.