

QUESTION ON NOTICE

NO. 242

Asked on Wednesday, 28 April 2004

MRS REILLY asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (Mr Lucas) -

QUESTION:

With reference to the Queensland government's commitment of \$240m to the construction of the much needed Tugun Bypass and the Federal government's refusal to support Queensland, by intervening to require New South Wales to agree to the western route, or alternatively, allowing airport land to be used for the fall back option of the eastern route -

- (1) What powers have the Federal government to require New South Wales to cooperate and allow the construction of the Tugun Bypass of the preferred western route?
- (2) Has the Federal government played any role in canvassing/planning the construction of the bypass east of the airport? (in other words B option)?
- (3) Was the Deputy Prime Minister aware of this?
- (4) Is he aware if the Federal Member for McPherson, Mrs Margaret May MP, was briefed by Federal officials, or made aware of the B option as a fallback if the western route was unable to proceed?
- (5) Was there any reference in the Federally chaired planning documentation of any statements in opposition to any eastern route being lodged by Mrs May?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your interest in this nationally-significant project and raising these questions with me.

I held separate discussions with Senator Ian Campbell, federal Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Honourable John Anderson MP, Deputy Prime Minister and federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services and the Honourable Carl Scully MP, New South Wales Minister for Roads and Minister for Housing at the Australian Transport Council meeting in Perth on 30 April 2004 about progressing the Tugun Bypass. I was successful in getting the ministers to agree to a meeting of senior executives from the federal, New South Wales and Queensland governments to address environmental concerns and other issues regarding construction of the western C4 route. That meeting of senior executives occurred on 12 May 2004.

I held a joint press conference at Tweed Heads on 24 May 2004 with Mr Scully where he announced that he and the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority are now satisfied that their environmental concerns relating to the C4 option had been substantially met and that the bypass can now proceed to the environmental approval process with RTA as a co-proponent.

I have ordered an immediate halt to any further work on the eastern route and this will become permanent once the final environmental sign-off is given for C4.

Mr Anderson has confirmed the \$120m federal funding allocated to the Tugun Bypass, and together with the Queensland funding of \$240m, will provide for construction of the bypass.

This is indeed great news for the Gold Coast and Tweed areas.

For the record, I now set out my answer to the member's questions.

- (1) The Queensland government believes that the Commonwealth has legislative and financial (grants) power to force NSW to proceed with the Tugun Bypass. The Deputy Prime Minister and the federal Minister for Roads have repeatedly denied this power but have immediately claimed credit for last week's breakthrough with the NSW government.
- (2 &3) The Tugun Bypass inter-governmental working party included representatives from Queensland, New South Wales and the Commonwealth governments. The Commonwealth representative from the Department of Transport and Regional Services confirmed the following in Meeting No. 4 held on 2 April 2003:
 - federal funding was capped at \$120m
 - route selection was a matter for Queensland
 - federal funding was contingent on a full bypass of Tugun, but this did not preclude 'B' options.

This advice was consistent with the agreement signed by Mr Anderson and the former Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads on 7 March 2003.

- (4) I am not aware of any specific briefing given to the federal Member for McPherson, Mrs Margaret May MP, by federal officials. However, I would have hoped that she had informed herself of the official Commonwealth position before going public and taking a position on the B4 option on behalf of the Commonwealth government. It is difficult to believe that Mrs May either (a) would not have been offered regular briefings by her Commonwealth officials on the bypass or (b) if not offered briefings, (that is, overlooked by her federal minister), that she would not have insisted on being regularly briefed. Her statements were contrary to the agreed Commonwealth/Queensland government position outlined in the March 2003 agreement, and subsequently clarified by the Commonwealth representative on the inter-governmental working party on 2 April 2004, that is, B options were acceptable to the Commonwealth as a fallback, should the western C4 option not proceed.
- (5) At the time this matter was considered by the inter-governmental working party, there was no indication that Mrs May opposed the eastern route. Perhaps an FOI application to the Commonwealth might reveal whether she was briefed and her views or whether she simply took no interest in the Tugun Bypass.