

Question on Notice

No. 804

Asked on 24 May 2007

MS LEE LONG asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS) -

QUESTION:

With reference to the Kuranda Range Road upgrade and his answer to my Question on Notice No. 55 –

- 1) What progress has been made to date in securing relevant Federal Government approvals, especially those expected in March this year?
- 2) What impact are delays having on cost projections?
- 3) When in construction expected to begin?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Tablelands for the question.

Following extensive information provided by the state government, in early June 2007 the federal government granted conditional approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act* for the proposed Kuranda Range Road upgrade. Main Roads is currently considering the full implications of the federal government's detailed conditions.

As at mid June 2007, Main Roads was also awaiting approvals from the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) Ministerial Council. The joint federal/state Ministerial Council is considering granting approvals for re-zoning of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA). This will allow WTMA to process the permit for investigations to be carried out in the WTWHA, as needed for the project's detailed design phase. There is no firm timeframe for the Ministerial Council approval but Main Roads hopes to have this decision shortly, given the recent EPBC conditional approval.

A firm estimate of the cost of the project won't be known until detailed design work is completed. This work cannot start until the federal government's conditions are met and the EPBC approvals are granted.

Given that the implications of the federal government's conditions are still being assessed and that a final approval has not yet been granted under the EPBC Act or by the WTMA Ministerial Council, there is as yet no firm timetable for construction start.

Again I draw your attention to the environmental benefits that the proposed upgrade will deliver. Main Roads' preliminary design for the upgrade to four lanes includes the following features to improve environmental outcomes, such as:

- bridging along 40% of the length of the road, to improve safe movements between habitats for native animals and reduce roadkill
- avoiding rare native plant species as much as possible and carrying out research to ensure they could grow under most of the bridges
- plans for top-down construction of bridges in highly sensitive areas, to reduce clearing needed during construction
- plans for extensive revegetation to reduce visual impacts as well as improve environmental outcomes
- revegetating all areas of the existing road that are not covered by the upgraded road
- minimising clearing so that the upgraded road occupies only 16.3 hectares more than the existing road, with most outside the Wet Tropics World Heritage area (2.5 hectares within the area).