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21 October 2014

The Secretary
Public Works Committee
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

Email: scott.hennessy@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Re: South Arm Highway Extension/Rokeby Main Road

I am writing to you to convey our concerns regarding the South Arm Highway Upgrade and in particular the entrance to the Howrah Garden Centre complex.

Background

My wife and I are the Leasehold owners of the Howrah Nursery (part of the Howrah Garden Centre Complex) situated at 469 Rokeby Road, Howrah. We are a small family owned and operated business that employs 4 staff, 2 of whom have relocated to Tasmania from interstate to take up their positions within our business. These families rely on us for a strong and prosperous business for their long term job security.

What we have heard recently has certainly been very worrying and has caused us much stress, anguish and anxiety and many a sleepless night as well as a monetary sum in engaging solicitors.

When we purchased the lease back in December 1999 we undertook all the prudent legal business practice searches. At that time we were aware of an impending new road to be built however at that time there were no plans, impact studies or a design therefore impossible for us to foresee the impact on our business. (As it has turned out, the impact will be considerable and is very worrying because the current plans now show the existing entrance to our business is now 1 kilometre past our current entrance).

Greg spoke with Craig Tarbottom (Engineer) at Department of State Growth by phone on Monday 29th June regarding the lack of information and our concerns over the rumours that were circulating at that time; we had not heard anything concrete on what was actually happening with the road. I understand that I am a Lessee and not the owner nonetheless I have a strong interest in the area that we lease and the impact on our business and the 5 families that it helps support.

Emailed same letter sent to Craig Tarbottom (Engineer) at Stategrowth to Rene Hiddings office, Minister for Infrastructure making him aware of our concerns, receipt of letter has been acknowledged and we have spoken to the Minister personally regarding our concerns.

As a result of my letter to Craig Tarbottom dated 11 July 2014 we had a meeting with Graeme Nibbs, Shane Gregory and Ben Moloney from State Growth on 8 August 2014 expressing our concerns and the ways in which we could be assisted to help our business sustain itself to overcome the enormous disruption that will occur as a result of the building process. It was agreed by both parties to consider during construction phase paid advertising, proper signage, sealing carpark due to enormous amounts of dust floating over our business. During this meeting I was shown the plan that shows the entrance to Howrah Garden Centre Complex and Buckingham Drive 1 kilometre past our existing entrance then turning right off South Arm Highway into Tollard Drive then into a service road back to Howrah Garden Centre Complex.

On 2 September, 2014 I emailed an advertising quote based on 12 months coverage from a television station to Graeme Nibbs. We are receiving the run around and are already feeling the effects of the road being built as we are now a month into construction, we require financial assistance to survive the next 2 years.

Our Lease at Howrah Nursery

Our Retail Garden Centre business is "leasehold" with a long term lease with 2 years still to run on our current option then a further 4 years, which we will be exercising in March 2015, and then a further 2 options both of which are 5 years. This gives us a total secured lease of 16 years. Over the past our premises were run down and certainly inadequate for the type of business we wished to conduct, so with a secured lease we have invested over half a million dollars in upgrades since taking over on 26 December 1999 in the knowledge that we had until 2030 to recoup our investment.

Entrance to Howrah Nursery (Howrah Garden Centre Complex)

Subsequent to telephone conversation with Craig Tarbottom there were 2 options and rumours of a 3rd option.

Option 1 DIER's preferred option being the new entrance way for our complex to be off of Tollard Drive. As you are aware this is some 1000 plus meters away which will certainly impact our business dramatically as convenience these days is all important. Customers of Howrah Garden Centre Complex and residents of Howrah Gardens will travel past the current entrance have to drive all the way up to Tollard Drive turn right at lights then back track the same distance through a service road to gain access to our businesses and their homes.

Option 2 The second option is for a 3rd set of lights between Merindah Street and Pass Road/Tollard Drive intersections.

Option 3 Can't be substantiated (rumour) DIER to purchase the complex and turn into housing. This totally destroys our business!! We have been told that works will start Nov 2014 (works actually commenced 6 to 8 weeks ago on Stage 2). September, October, November, December are our largest turnover months where we make the majority of our profit that sustains us for the rest of the year. The works will certainly decimate our earning capacity so making it unviable for us to make it through until next spring without significant job losses.

Suggestions

We are not unreasonable people yes we do need a new road to cope with increasing development and traffic demands we fully acknowledge this however their needs to be consultation to minimise disruption and improve outcomes. Even if there were to be a slip lane coming out of Howrah Garden Centre Complex back onto Rokeby Road toward city this would be an improvement. So customers leaving the centre did not have to travel back to Tollard Drive then back onto Rokeby Road.

Traffic lights in front of Howrah Garden Centre Complex from an economic point of view would work but there are also lights at Merindah Street, Howrah a second set on Pass Road/Tollard Drive intersection would be intolerable at peak hour and just cause a stationery bottleneck of traffic. A roundabout outside Howrah Garden Centre could be a better option, doesn't impede traffic flow as much as traffic lights.

We have video footage from 4.30 pm of a night that shows traffic from Shoreline roundabout, Howrah stationery outside our business not moving as a result of lights at Merindah Street and Pass Road,Tollard Drive "lighted" intersection – completely bottlenecking traffic.

Cause & Effect

How do we know roadworks will be catastrophic to our business. For 2 days back in September the road was under the influence of workers stopping starting traffic to allow trucks in and out for most of the day except peak hour when trees from Church of Christ, Rokeby Road, Howrah were cut down. On this day we did not turn over enough money to pay wages for 1 staff member for the day let alone 3 or enough to help pay the rent, electricity, water, rates, etc! The reality is Monday to Friday every day there will be workers standing with paddlepop signs stopping 1 lane of traffic at a time to get road built. If it is too hard or too longer wait for our customers they will forget about us and drive to our competitors, we will not survive the 2 years.

Conclusion

As you can see we certainly have a personal and legal interest in what is happening to this complex and wish to be involved in the committee process and insist on being kept fully informed of any developments in relation to the planning and construction of this new 4 lane highway. As our investment is substantial we will be pursuing our interest in relation to this matter costing us more money. Through no bad business practices, bad decisions or bad investments by ourselves we have the very real potential to lose our livelihood because of

the decisions of the State Government. This affects our ability to educate our children privately and ensure a better life for our disabled son. Even if a package is agreed upon during the construction phase there is no guarantee that after the construction stage our business will be any better off, so what happens then?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Faithfully

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