

INQUIRY INTO THE SUSTAINABILITY AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES OF VICTORIA'S RURAL AND REGIONAL COUNCILS

Submitted by: The Residents of Woolpack Road, St Arnaud

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SUBMISSION CONTENT

My husband and I, with the support of 18 other residents who live mostly on 8 hectare blocks, just 7 kms outside the town limits of the small rural town of St Arnaud have an unsafe road to travel on. The road we live on (or must access) is called Woolpack Road, and is 4.8 kms in length which connects two major roads; Sunraysia Highway and Wycheproof Road. We live in Northern Grampians Shire (NGS).

During the past years we have written many letters, made many telephone calls and met with Council staff to have our gravel road graded at regular intervals. As well, residents have requested signage, blind corners be made safe, and importantly reconstruction of the entry/exit points – the acute angles of Woolpack Road leading onto both Sunraysia Highway and Wycheproof Road (making them into T intersections).

From January to April this year corrugations on Woolpack Road were already so deep that drivers could only travel safely at between 10 and 15 kms per hour as the build up of gravel became inches thick, vehicles would slide on bends and corners. That's when residents sent two letters and a petition, made three phone calls and met with local Cr Tony Driscoll to get the road graded, and after waiting two more weeks and still nothing done, we sent a Letter to the Editor of North Central News. The following day the road was graded. Altogether, it was more than a six-month wait, as the road was already unsafe at the time we began writing letters.

During the past 20 or so years, Woolpack Road has been worsening with the increased number of residents and amount of traffic, that the road needs more attention and more often. Residents believe that whenever the road is graded, it is not graded properly and that is the reason it deteriorates quickly.

During our meeting with Cr Driscoll one of the residents who has a skilled knowledge on roads explained that after the grader has graded the road a vibrating roller or sheep's foot roller needs to go over it – this would provide good compaction and the road would not deteriorate so quickly.

We wrote again on 11th August to ask that the road be maintained again as the winter rains and overflow from one of the dams had covered the road causing deep gouges, ruts and potholes some of which are now about 2feet across, as well as the rain, daily traffic and

heavy vehicles have chewed into the road. The large number of vehicles accessing the road to bring in other machinery or drop off heavy rail line and large amounts of ballast at the small siding for the rail upgrade to Mildura. The siding is adjacent to Woolpack Road. In many places along the road there are deep potholes and patches of corrugations.

In our letter we pointed out that Council already knew of some of the problems with Woolpack Road and quoted one reason from Nic Murphy former NGSC Acting Manager for Infrastructure when he wrote in 2016 “Even though water is carried to the site, it is near impossible to get the pavement wet enough to be able to cut any deeper than the corrugates therefore the corrugates are usually just cut off and flattened out. It is also very hard to obtain the required compaction when the moisture in the pavement is not high so we find the road will deteriorate again quite quickly.”

We asked Council why is it near impossible to get the road wet enough to grade properly, and seeing Council knows that the rate of deterioration is linked to the ratio of moisture, why not take steps to solve the problem? But then again, Council has consistently sent a water truck out, in hot weather, at 4pm on a particular day and then returned the next day to grade the road.

We believe that the amount of rain in recent weeks has given the road a good soaking, and would have been sufficient to have Woolpack Road properly graded at the time, and then be rolled for compaction. Council has a vibrating roller attached to the grader, but does not use the roller on Woolpack Road. Council employee Mr Hayden Harvey told us on 16th August that Council does not have a strong enough grader that will go deep enough other than to take only the tops off the corrugations. Our question to Council would be, why not hire a stronger grader to do a proper job? Mr Harvey also said he would have the pot holes filled in, as yet nothing has been done.

In summation of our submission the residents of Woolpack Road say that governments have a responsibility to provide funding to ensure programs are put in place for Regional Councils to maintain and make safe roads for communities. They must be roads on which people can travel safely to work, take children to school, visit doctors and go shopping. These are some of the everyday things we do.

We requested a copy of the recent Report on Woolpack Road from Council on 11th August from Mr Michael Bailey CEO, and as yet, we have not received a copy of that report, nor have we received acknowledgement of our letter.

We do not request that this submission be treated as confidential, and we are prepared to appear before the committee if so called.

Yours sincerely

Iris and Clive Teusner