Submission re:

Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads

Terms Of Reference

1. the effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads;

2. the existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria;

3. the lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising which roads are in dire need of repair; and

4. the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body.

This submission is primarily concerned with No 3 of the Terms Of Reference, specifically as it regards the lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritizing which roads are in dire need of repair.

For the purposes of this submission the term “repair” here is understood to include any action which serves to improve road condition and/or safety - or - serves to lessen its contribution to causing harm and/or damage.

Specifically, this submission wishes to draw attention to the need to afford genuine consultation with, and input from, residents who are concerned about the environmental impacts of roads in locally identifiable wildlife hotspots and valuable wildlife/natural heritage corridors.

As a country resident and heavy user of country roads I endorse and support the creation of any mechanism or forum which enables and encourages input from country residents who are sick of seeing the continual encroachment of roads into our natural heritage, the destruction of valuable remnant native habitat, and the inhumane slaughter of our unique wildlife on our roads.

As a long-term country resident who commutes to work daily across two municipal areas covering a round trip of approximately 600 km a week – and as a regular and extensive user of country roads beyond this, I am extremely concerned at the high rates of wildlife road kill that I witness daily on our country roads – and the apparent lack of any meaningful attempt to mitigate the rates of road kill impacting on our native fauna including an extensive variety of birds and animals.

Contemporary vehicles are faster than ever before, speed limits higher, and the largely unexamined imperative to ramp up the pace in getting from point A. to B. greater than ever before. The impact on our unique and extremely valuable natural heritage is nothing short of devastating – yet is little acknowledged. This, at a time when we are witnessing the alarming degradation of biomass, wildlife and
species survival forecasts globally. Surely a little bit of respect for our native wildlife is warranted on our country roads and in our roads policy-making, after all our wildlife has been here (in our country locations) far longer than we have.

Our country roads and their continual encroachment into more and more natural habitat means they are impacting on our natural heritage in a manner, and to an extent, which warrants and demands specific meaningful consideration in terms of any ongoing planning and management of our country road network. Yet at the moment I and many others who share my concerns, do not feel that such considerations are receiving the due respect and prominence they urgently require.

As a long-term country resident who extensively uses country roads, witnesses their condition and what is happening on them every week day, I am aware that lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritizing which roads are in dire need of repair is an issue that needs to be addressed. Specifically, taking meaningful action to reduce damage to, and enhance welfare of, our native wildlife (by lowering maximum speeds permitted in locally identified/nominated wildlife hotspots) represents a significant form of repair which would serve simultaneously to improve the safety of motorists.

Reduced maximum speeds in areas of known hazard translates to increased time available to react to the sudden appearance of a moving hazard – a potential life saver on our country roads that are known to be heavily frequented by wildlife, for both wildlife and motorist.

Research interstate has demonstrated that lowering the speed limit to 80km (even better to 60km or 70km) in identified wildlife hotspots or wildlife movement corridors – during the hours of dusk and dawn alone – is extremely beneficial in terms of reducing the decimation of wildlife on our roads – and thereby also improving motorist safety.

The apparent failure of VicRoads to genuinely consult with regional communities was epitomized nowhere better in recent times than in the debacle evidenced in VicRoads’ decimation of hundreds of extremely valuable old eucalyptus trees (critically important remnant habitat) in its duplication of the Western Highway between Buangor and Stawell. In this illustrative instance we saw that a 91 year old grandmother with legitimate concerns regarding the legacy about to be left for future generations felt so poorly consulted that she had to chain herself to a tree in order to make her clearly warranted concerns heard!


There are numerous roads throughout each of the Central Goldfields, Pyrenees, Hepburn, Mount Alexander and Macedon Ranges shires alone (of which I am personally aware) where implementing and enforcing meaningfully lowered maximum speeds in limited sections of identified high wildlife
population (typically forested sections or sections near water supply) would be of immense benefit in reducing the horrific and inhumane devastation of road kill - and would thereby also serve to meaningfully decrease the risk of serious road accidents for motorists alike.

However, currently there appears to be a lack, or gap, in terms of any realistic forum which affords country residents (or others) who are genuinely concerned about these globally significant issues the opportunity of meaningful input into policy making which would aim to address these little-acknowledged yet critically important issues.

Please find attached weblinks which provide brief but illustrative examples of:

A. Rural residents’ concerns re road kill:


B. Interstate examples re road kill impacts & considered solutions to the issue

http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/roadkill-in-tasmania/9099108


This Submission lodged by Patrick Hockey, Victoria.

Contact information provided via email with this submission.