

MR J. HANN: Yep. So, um, on that point, we – we’ll kick off. I – I’ve just got some procedural things to - - -

MS C. ELLIOT: Yeah.

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MR HANN: - - - run through - - -

MR B. HOLMES: Yeah.

10 MR HANN: - - - and then we’ll – we’ll hand over to you to take us through your – ah, your determination report and – and go from there. But, look, I – just, um, with – in – in terms of the recording of our meeting and – and so on, I’ll – I’ll do – ‘cause I’m not sure whether you’re familiar with how the – the - - -

15 MS C. ELLIOT: I think - - -

MR HANN: - - - Commission works - - -

MS ELLIOT: - - - not since - - -

20

MR HANN: - - - these days.

MS ELLIOT: - - - it started to be recorded - - -

25 MR HANN: Yeah. Which - - -

MS ELLIOT: - - - back in the days - - -

MR HANN: - - - is since - - -

30

MS ELLIOT: - - - when it wasn’t. Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - I think, the beginning of last year.

35 MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HANN: So, look – look, before we begin I’d like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, ah, the Worimi People. I’d also like to pay my respect to their elders past and present and to the elders from other communities who may be here today. So welcome to the meeting today. Lindfield Property Nominee Proprietary Limited and NGP Investments (No 2), ah, Proprietary Limited, the applicant, has lodged a request to review the Gateway determination for a planning proposal seeking to amend the Great Lakes Local Environmental Plan 2014 to facilitate the development of a highway service centre at 9844 Pacific Highway, Bulahdelah.

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So my name's John Hann. I'm the chair of this IPC panel, and joining me is my fellow Commissioner, Peter Williams. The other attendees are Helen Mulcahy and Brad James from our secretariat, and, ah, Matthew who's in charge of all this equipment recording. So I'll go into that now. Look, so in the interests of openness and transparency, and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded, and we put a transcript up on our website. Ah, the meeting's one part of our consideration of the matter, and so that will form one of the several sources of information which we'll use to provide our advice. So it's important, look, if we can ask you some questions as we – as we go through it to clarify issues, but if we've asked some questions you're not sure of the response at the time, look, feel free to provide that to us later, if you could just provide that in written material as soon as possible within seven days - - -

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - would be appreciated - - -

MR HOLMES: Okay.

MR HANN: - - - Caitlin and Ben. So, look, just as the kick off, if you can just say your name before you speak the first time just so that we've got that figured out for Matthew, although I think with a small meeting it's not so difficult - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - but this is a standard approach, and just in the course of our discussions, if you don't talk over the top, otherwise it gets a bit convoluted to figure out - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

MR HANN: - - - who said what. So on that basis, ah, I think we're ready to start.

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

MR HANN: So, look, from Peter and my point of view, could you take us through just the key aspects. Obviously we've read the documentation - - -

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - ah, but particularly your report and obviously your conclusions and – and the basis upon which you arrived at those.

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

MR HANN: And I guess, not surprisingly, one of the areas of – of particular interest is just the conclusions around the, ah, socio-economic aspects of the impacts on - - -

5 MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - the township itself.

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

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MS ELLIOT: Okay.

MR HANN: Okay.

15 MR HOLMES: Sure. So Ben Holmes. Um, Caitlin, are you happy for me to - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah, yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - run through that? So I guess the – I'll start with the summary
20 of our recommendation.

MR HANN: Okay.

MR HOLMES: So, um, we recommend that the planning proposal not proceed, and
25 that recommendation was, um, supported by the Gateway with the determination
being issued that the proposal not proceed. Um, we didn't support the planning
proposal because we considered that it didn't have strategic merit. We're of the view
that it was inconsistent with the Roads and Maritime Services Pacific Highway
Service Centres Policy, which does not identify Bulahdelah as a location for future
30 highway service centre development. The proposal was considered to be
inconsistent with Ministerial Direction 5.4, Commercial and Retail Development
along the Pacific Highway, North Coast, which implements the RMS Pacific
Highway Service Centres Policy. Um, it was our view the proposal undermines the
intent of the policy and direction which aims to have strategic and considered
35 locations for highway service centres on that national significant transport corridor.

Um, we considered the studies that have been provided by, um, council, which I
understand were, um, commissioned by the proponent. Um, the supporting study –
the supporting studies include an economic impact assessment and a community
40 survey. Um, both of those studies, in our view, indicated the potential for negative
impacts on the town centre, and while council opposed to offset those impacts, um,
through things like, um, landscaping by way of a planning agreement, um, it was our
view that those mitigation measures to offset impacts, um, had not really been
quantified, and the effectiveness of those measures hadn't been evaluated, so, um, it
45 was our view that those offset measures that were proposed did not demonstrate that
they would reinforce the town centre as required by section 9.1, Direction 5.4.

Um, it was also our view that the supporting studies did not accurately justify the proposal's inconsistency, um, with the direction, as I mentioned, um, the Pacific Highway Service Centres Policy, um, the council's Great Lakes Highway Service Centre Strategy, um, as well, and that these policies seek to ensure that new
5 commercial developments are considered strategically and that HSCs, so highway service centres, balance those rest and service needs, um, with highway users looking at it as a safe and efficient traffic movement of the highway. Um, we also considered that the supporting studies didn't justify the proposals inconsistent with the Hunter Regional Plan which seeks to enhance inter-regional linkages to support economic
10 growth and revitalise communities.

So that's the summary of where we, um, got to with our assessment. The key matters that informed that, um, are identified in our report under Need for the Planning Proposal. So the need for highway service centres on the Pacific Highway is detailed
15 in the RMSs policy. Um, it was prepared in response to proliferation of commercial and retail development fronting the Pacific Highway and was finalised and implemented by the Ministerial Direction, um, back in 1998. Um, that direction, so Ministerial Direction 5.4, um, implements a policy following a 2014 review. The direction identifies the cases for new HSCs, um, and it sets out criteria for HSCs
20 proposed for other locations. Um, this includes a requirement that HSCs reinforce the retail and commercial role of town centres. Neither the policy nor direction 5.4 identified Bulahdelah as a supporting location for a highway service centre. Um, the 2014 policy review gave specific consideration to HSC at Bulahdelah, so I believe you guys were provided with a copy of that, um, report.

25

MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: So the submissions report on that review notes that Bulahdelah should remain a highway service centre town because it's highly accessible for light
30 and recreational vehicles. The report also states that the highway service centre at Taree and a proposed centre at Heatherbrae, once it's bypassed, provides sufficient services for the seeable future, and the advice that we obtained from RMS, which was the 2018 advice that was sent through to council, um, which we also, um, ah, got in touch with – with RMS and, um, sought to confirm whether that was still their
35 advice. Um, it was that they maintain that position that Bulahdelah wasn't a suitable location for a highway service centre and that they did not support the planning proposal.

Um, the – the economic impact was a key part of our assessment. So while the
40 planning proposal sought to justify its inconsistency with RMSs policy and council strategy for highway economic benefits that a highway service centre will provide for Bulahdelah, um, the economic impact assessment was provided, um, and talked about 60 direct jobs being created, um, suggesting that it would be less likely to compete with trade, um, with the existing town centre because the offering would be
45 different and that it'd attract additional trade to the town. We, um, you know, accepted those views broadly, um, however, we also noted that, um, the EIA made this statement that said, you know, predicting impacts on the town centre is vexed.

Um, and then it went on to, um, provide some further information by way of the community survey that was undertaken to understand what the preferences would be for people that were in the town centre on two particular dates where they undertook the survey, and the EI stated that the community survey, um, found that between 20
5 to potentially 30 per cent of respondents may not have visited Bulahdelah Town Centre that day were the highway service centre already operational. So it was our view that the impact of losing up to approximately 30 per cent of potential visitors on the town centre had not been fully explored by the EIA that was provided and that this was potentially a significant impact on the town.

10 Um, the impact of existing service stations, the town was evaluated by the EIA to be an immediate 13 per cent reduction on existing trade. Um, all these changes indicate fewer visitors. In turn, less money is spent in the town centre. The resilience of the businesses in the town centre to withstand that change in trade was not known.

15 Um, we mentioned the offsets before and that there was the – the intention for those offsets to, um, be put in place to, um, you know, mitigate potential impacts from the highway service centre, but it was our view that – yeah – they haven't demonstrated that those measures were going to reinforce that town centre. So the assertion that
20 the trade in Bulahdelah Town Centre had decreased since the bypass was acknowledged by us, but it was our view the economic outlook for Bulahdelah Town Centre appeared positive without a highway service centre.

25 The EIA recognises that highway service type businesses continue to trade since the town was bypassed in 2013. New businesses being attracted to Bulahdelah Town Centre in the form of the national restaurant chain Oliver's, and the EIA indicates that traffic volumes are projected to increase by 34 per cent between 2016 and 20-8 – and 2028, suggesting the potential growth in trade for Bulahdelah without the highway service centre. Caitlin, is there anything you would like to add to that?

30 MS ELLIOT: No. I think that's covered probably our key aspects of our assessment, I think –the economic and, ah, existing policy framework. Um, yeah. We did have the recommendation for council in lieu of, um, RMS reviewing the - - -

35 MR HANN: Yeah.

MS ELLIOT: - - - the highway for – for council to undertake their own review, because I think - - -

40 MR HANN: Yeah.

MS ELLIOT: - - - 2004 is the date of their – yeah - - -

MR HANN: Yeah.

45 MS ELLIOT: - - - Great Lakes - - -

MR HANN: And – and - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

5 MR HANN: - - - the 2014 review relied - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

10 MR HANN: - - - significantly on – on the council policy of - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yes.

MR HANN: Well, the former council’s policy, which is 10 – 10 years prior to that.

15 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MS ELLIOT: Yep.

20 MR HANN: All right. Ah, look, I’ve got a couple of questions, and I – and I know Peter does as well. Um, look – yeah – I think you used the word “vexed” in – you know, trying to accurately forecast what the impacts are - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

25 MR HANN: - - - is difficult. One thing that seems fairly solid in the data is that there’s approximately 60, ah, positions that would be created in terms of employment - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

30 MR HANN: - - - which presumably would be almost, if not entirely, ah, those in Bulahdelah, which is a – I think probably a significant input to the – the economics and the social fabric - - -

35 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

40 MR HANN: - - - of – of Bulahdelah, so that’s something that is fairly tangible. Ah, how do you – how do you feel in terms of – of that being, if you like, ah – the substance of that or the quantum of that against – all right – there could be 30 per cent less visitation based on the surveys that were done and possibly 10 or 15 per cent of less custom to the existing two – two fuel suppliers perhaps and some of the other businesses, but the 60 positions available certainly – plus the multiplier effect – would seem to be a fairly substantial input to the town. So I just wanted to know how you balance that out really, because that’s a tangible number - - -

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MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - ah, and while the economic report didn't really go into the detail of what that would translate to, um, it seems reasonable to assume that's a pretty substantial impact – positive impact on a town that perhaps would more than offset the – the potential loss of visitation as indicated from the survey as well as some loss of business. Just interested in your – your views on that.

MR HOLMES: Yeah. So we note in the report that there will be the 60 jobs. Um, as you say, what the EIA doesn't demonstrate is whether or not that does offset the potential impacts to the town, and that's the bit which we're quite clear that we're uncertain about, um, whether, you know, the measures that are proposed will – will offset that impact. So it was our view that the direction requires and demonstrates that they are reinforcing the commercial and retail centre of the town and that evidence hadn't been provided in the material given to us by council.

MR HANN: Is there any examples of – I mean obviously – go back a step. The 2014 review was barely a year after the bypass, so it was - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - it was pretty – it was early days as to the impact. Now, the impact has obviously been profound just in terms of the numbers that are presented in the documents around this – this application. Um, so the proponents, whom we've just met with, um, are – affirm in their view, as you might imagine, that – that there will be an increase in visitation that's leveraged from the service centre should it be approved and – and up – and up and running. Um, we did ask, can they give any examples of – of that. In other words, that's a speculation. They're forecasting that there will be some percentage of those – those that stop at the service centre will visit the town. They weren't able to give any – are you aware of any examples where you've got a – a service centre that's recently been established and what sort of, um – you know, there was something comparable? Are - - -

MS ELLIOT: I'm not - - -

MR HOLMES: So - - -

MS ELLIOT: - - - aware. Nothing comes to mind for me but - - -

MR HOLMES: No.

MR HANN: Because that would be helpful obviously.

MR HOLMES: So to – to my mind - - -

MR HANN: You know, we're – we're trying to grapple with hard data, and we're struggling, other than the 60 - - -

MR HOLMES: We – we – we agree with you - - -

MR HANN: - - - additional - - -

MR HOLMES: - - - on that – on that fact. We – we are - - -

5 MR HANN: - - - people employed.

MR HOLMES: - - - struggling to grapple with hard data. I think it would be a good question to ask RMS who, um, you know, ultimately are the ones who investigate whether or not there's - - -

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MR HANN: We have asked that and - - -

MR HOLMES: Okay.

15 MR HANN: - - - they've said they'd come back to us - - -

MR HOLMES: Okay.

MR HANN: - - - on some information, so - - -

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MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - we met – we had a teleconference with them, and I've – I – I didn't mention it earlier. We had a teleconference with them on Thursday last week, ah, with, ah – I can't remember their names now, but, ah, based in the Newcastle – their Newcastle - - -

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MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

30 MR HANN: - - - office.

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

MR HANN: Yeah. Ah, so they're going to come back to us on that. Yeah.

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MR HOLMES: Yeah. So we're – we're not aware of any comparable examples, and we haven't, um, been provided with any data to suggest one way or other whether the proponent's solution's correct.

40 MR HANN: The other – the other interesting set of information that we learnt today is that the RMS own a parcel of land about one kilometre to the north of here, ah, which they've subsequently leased to a service centre which was a surprise to us because that's not something that seemed to be documented. I might be wrong, I might have missed it, but I didn't see any reference to that in the documentation - - -

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MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - ah, or correspondence from the RMS. So it seems at odds with the policy in – in – in – in the arguments that are presented that says, well, if you put a service centre it could be detrimental and it may certainly not be – not – won't – won't be positive, but what we've learnt is there's actually a service centre just a
5 kilometre down the road. Now, it's not a roadhouse. It doesn't have a McDonald's or a KFC or whatever, but nevertheless it is a – so I just wondered has that been factored into your consideration of this?

MR HOLMES: So we don't discuss it in our report. Um, as I understand, that
10 service station was a station that was already there - - -

MR HANN: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - um - - -
15

MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - prior to the bypass occurring. And as for the decision as to whether it should be retained, because it was in RMSs ownership, giving they were
20 bypassing and reviewing their policy, um, that would be a good question for RMS.

MR HANN: Yeah. We weren't aware of it, and they – they – not that I recall in our meeting on Thursday was it discussed, so it just seems at odds with the policy, because obviously, yes, it was an existing service centre. It – it was then closed with
25 the construction, as we - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - understand it, and now – then – now with the bypass completed, they've - - -
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MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - leased the land out to a service centre. Now, obviously it would be in – it's in their jurisdiction to be – to decide not to do that, but they've decided to, so I just - - -
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MR HOLMES: So when you say they've leased it out to be a service centre, what – what does that mean? Does that mean it would be meeting the definition in the policy around what a service centre is?
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MR HANN: I – I don't know.

MR HOLMES: Okay.
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MR HANN: I'd have to look – I'd have to – you know, you might like to comment on that.

MR HOLMES: Because I – I thought it was just a petrol station.

MR HANN: It's a petrol station. Yeah.

5 MS ELLIOT: Rather than a highway - - -

MR HOLMES: - - - is there at the moment, and that's only based on driving - - -

MR HANN: No, no.

10

MS ELLIOT: Yes.

MR HOLMES: - - - past the site.

15 MR HANN: It's a petrol station.

MR HOLMES: Um - - -

MR HANN: It's a fuel stop.

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MR HOLMES: Yeah. So - - -

MR HANN: Yeah. With toilets and whatever but - - -

25 MR HOLMES: - - - the thing is, if – if they came into us with a planning proposal to enable a highway service centre there, so if this was something new, we would assess it, you know, against the relevant requirements being the direction and regional plan and those things - - -

30 MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - but it hasn't featured in this assessment because it's something that's already there.

35 MR HANN: Okay.

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: All right.

40

MS ELLIOT: Different definition as well, I think.

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

45 MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HANN: Yeah, yeah. And a fair point. No. It's just something we thought, oh, okay, we weren't aware of this - - -

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

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MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - and it - - -

10 MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - certainly touches on the issues that we're talking about - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

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MR HANN: - - - but, ah, all right. Peter.

DR P. WILLIAMS: Thanks, John. Um, sorry, ah, Ben and Caitlin, what was made in the reasons, um, in the determination – Gateway determination report and justification assessment and so on in terms of the planning proposal's non-compliance from a strategic perspective, or not contrary to that strategic perspective, including things like the, um, RMS, ah, policy and, um – and also that there is Ministerial Directions and particularly Ministerial Direction 5.4 on commercial and retail development. Reading the – the department's Gateway Determination Report at page 11, it goes on to say – well, actually, on page 11 of that report, in fact, um, the planning proposal would appear to meet five of the six objectives of the Ministerial Determination Objectives - - -

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MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

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DR WILLIAMS: - - - (a) to (e), and a lot of weight, therefore, is placed on non-compliance with – or inconsistency might be a better word – with objective (f), and this is the objective to reinforce the role of retail and commercial development in town centres where they could best serve the population of the towns, and I think also in conjunction with that is at the time Bulahdelah was clearly performing the role of a highway service town.

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

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DR WILLIAMS: Um, could it be argued, well, that that – that role of the retail commercial development in the town centre has now been some – dramatically diminished by the bypass and so the whole justification about not putting a – a highway service centre here pre-bypass has now been undermined somewhat by the fact that Bulahdelah's role as a high – highway service town and providing these facilities has somewhat collapsed?

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

DR WILLIAMS: Um, and, in fact, what the – so the circumstances have changed, and what this service centre might do is provide – go to some extent to re-establishing Bulahdelah's role. So, in other words, it's now been transforming from a highway service town to a highway service centre. Um, I'm just trying to get that argument teased out to – to – seeing there's so much weight on that Ministerial Direction - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

10 DR WILLIAMS: - - - and yet arguably there's really only one grounds that you're basing - - -

MR HOLMES: So - - -

15 DR WILLIAMS: - - - that point.

MR HOLMES: - - - could it – could it be argued that – that, um, the role of that township has – or that town centre has diminished since, um, the bypass has occurred? Um, yes, it could be argued that way. That – that is what the planning proposal argues, um, and we accept that. The numbers are – are very clear that the number of people passing through has – has diminished substantially, and so logically you would conclude that, yeah, there – there would be a diminishment in trade. Um, equally we would say that, um, in the – where are we now – 20 – 2019 – in the – in the – in the five or six years that have passed - - -

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DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - um, there is evidence of growth in Bulahdelah, and so the example that we refer to in our report is the Oliver's chain, and we also note, um, that the general prediction in increase in traffic volumes that are predicted - - -

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DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - and the EIA includes a table where it demonstrates what that impact would be for the existing service - - -

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DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - stations, um, which suggest there would be further growth. The point about the Ministerial Direction, and, yeah, we – we agree that, um, (a) through (e) largely satisfies. Um, objective (f) we feel that doesn't satisfy it, and we've talked about that with the earlier questions. Um, our focus on – on – on that particular objective is because we feel that's the one that's pertinent to this planning proposal.

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DR WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: Um, the particular part of the direction which – which relates to it talks about:

5 *Any new commercial or retail development must not be established near the Pacific Highway if its proximity would be inconsistent with the objectives of this direction.*

10 And the objectives, you know, in totality include (f), and – and – and (f)'s that sort of key question. So that's why we focused on that one, and that's why we say, look, it isn't consistent with the direction because it – it doesn't provide us with enough evidence to say that it will reinforce, um, that commercial development in town centres.

15 As our, um, recommendation, which Caitlin referred to earlier, um, makes reference to is – and – and the planning proposal itself makes reference to, is it is a pertinent time to review council strategy, and, um, the town has now been bypassed, and we are several years on, and work out whether or not, um, a highway service centre would be a bad thing for Bulahdelah. It may be, um, that the evidence says that actually it would be a good thing, um, but at the moment we don't have that evidence, and through going through the strategic process, as we propose in our – in our assessment report - - -

DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

25 MR HOLMES: - - - where they would engage with the community, they would engage with the relevant businesses, they would - - -

DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

30 MR HOLMES: - - - engage with RMS, um, they could fully explore and come up with a strategic plan which may recommend that the highway service centre is the best way forward and – and – and then develop a strategy around, well, how do you basically reach off that highway service centre. So, you know, the measures that they're looking at putting forward have some real rigour and structure to them and that effectiveness has been evaluated through that strategic planning process.

DR WILLIAMS: Mmhmm.

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

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MR HOLMES: Caitlin, anything to add?

MS ELLIOT: No. That was really good, um, conclusion there.

45 MR HANN: Yeah. No, no. A fair – fair point.

DR WILLIAMS: Could – could I just – just - - -

MR HANN: Yeah, Peter.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - extend from that?

5 MR HANN: Yeah. Elaborate.

DR WILLIAMS: It's sort of related to it. This is just something that arose – something that the applicant mentioned at the meeting just before, ah, this one, um, and they were referring to this, ah, map on appendix (c) - - -

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MR HOLMES: Mmm.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - of the – the RMS policy, and they made the comment that, in fact, the biggest gap between highway service centres and town is between Tomago or Heatherbrae and Taree.

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MR HOLMES: Mmm.

DR WILLIAMS: Now originally that gap would have been filled by, of course, Bulahdelah - - -

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MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - as a - - -

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MR HOLMES: Yeah.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - highway service town, but it no longer - - -

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MR HOLMES: Yeah.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - performs that – that role, so there is now the largest gap on the North Coast – there's actually this – this length of the highway here.

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MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

DR WILLIAMS: So the argument could be made that the highway service centre is actually filling that gap which wasn't originally there but is now – has now been created.

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MS ELLIOT: RMS did consider that as part of - - -

DR WILLIAMS: Right.

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MS ELLIOT: - - - their 2014 review specifically looking at a highway service centre and – yeah - - -

DR WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MS ELLIOT: - - - came to the conclusion that Bulahdelah wasn't – was a highway service town rather than suitable - - -

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MR HANN: Yeah. But the town would supply the – whatever - - -

MS ELLIOT: That – that role. That function.

10 MR HANN: - - - the necessary support, if you like - - -

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - or equivalent service, I'd say - - -

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MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: And - - -

20 MR HANN: - - - rather than a highway - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - service centre.

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MR HOLMES: That's right.

MR HANN: Yeah.

30 MR HOLMES: And – and RMS, um, in reaching that conclusion, they recognise that Bulahdelah won't perform the full functions of a highway service centre, but it will be suitable for a certain section of those travellers. So it says, look, it isn't great for trucks, um, however, um, it is good for recreational and light vehicles because of the easy access into and out of that town. So that was considered at the time, um, by
35 RMS.

MR HANN: Okay.

40 DR WILLIAMS: Thanks. Thank you very much for that. Thank you. Thanks, John.

MR HANN: Are you, um – I mean, clearly the council have had a – a major change - - -

45 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - of – of position and – and they've voted on it.

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: Um, and from the material that we've got before us, the community appear to be significantly in support of the highway service centre. Um, some of it's
5 anecdotal, I think, ah, in terms of this hall was apparently filled with people at the forum, and I'm not sure whether you – you attended - - -

MS ELLIOT: No.

10 MR HANN: - - - that or not.

MS ELLIOT: We didn't.

MR HANN: And, ah, from what we've been told, that there was overwhelming
15 support for, ah, the highway service centre.

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: Ah, the Chamber of Commerce have written and provided their
20 support. So, in other words, the local community here, which obviously we place a lot of, you know, value, ah, to that - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

25 MR HANN: - - - would appear to believe that the town will benefit from it as opposed to, um, being a negative impact. Is that a surprise to you, ah, in terms of - - -

MS ELLIOT: Um - - -

30 MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - this exercise?

35 MR HOLMES: So is it a surprise? Um, I guess we would go back a couple of steps and say that we weren't – we didn't attend that meeting - - -

MR HANN: Yeah.

40 MR HOLMES: - - - um, and as far as we're aware the council didn't attend that meeting either, but you could confirm that with council as to whether they - - -

MR HANN: We've been informed they did but - - -

45 MR HOLMES: Oh, okay.

MR HANN: - - - again - - -

MR HOLMES: Okay.

MR HANN: - - - that's anecdotal.

5 MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: Okay.

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

10

MR HANN: We, you know, haven't seen a record of it – a record - - -

MR HOLMES: So - - -

15

MR HANN: - - - of attendance - - -

MR HOLMES: My - - -

MR HANN: - - - but, ah - - -

20

MR HOLMES: My - - -

MR HANN: - - - we were informed of that just earlier today.

25

MR HOLMES: Yeah. Okay. So my observation around what's provided in the material to us, which are in the planning proposal, so Chamber of Commerce meeting number 1, um, and Chamber of Commerce meeting number 2, um, they talked about the proposal being well received, but they also - - -

30

MR HANN: These are meetings that you attended or you - - -

MR HOLMES: No.

MS ELLIOT: No.

35

MR HOLMES: These - - -

MS ELLIOT: Okay. Right.

40

MR HOLMES: These are the meetings that, um, the planning proposal advise us that the proponent undertook, um - - -

MR HANN: Right. Okay. Sure. Just – I just wanted to be clear. Yeah.

45

MR HOLMES: - - - in 2016.

MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: So both of the – so the planning proposal says that both of those meetings, um:

5 *The proposal was well received by some, while others raised concern about
- - -*

MR HANN: Yeah.

10 MR HOLMES:

- - - the potential impact on business within the existing township, um, and its potential decline as a result of the highway service centre proposal.

15 Um, the planning proposal also refers to a public meeting that was held, um:

...to brief the community on the planning proposal, including the masterplan components.

20 MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: It said:

25 *Many people spoke of the need for growth within the township with new opportunities required to stimulate growth. Others remained concerned about local business, um, as well as how the highway centre – um, service centre development would form part of the broader masterplan concept, including whether the masterplan would ever be implemented or simply that the service station be undertaken. To assure the community this would - - -*

30 MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES:

35 *- - - ah, not be the case, proponent provided an undertaking this would not occur.*

40 So what I take from that is there is mixed views, so – or there – there is concern about a potential highway service centre, so that is there, and there is also a linking of the highway service centre with the broader masterplan for the site. Now, I'm not
45 sure what the broader masterplan was that was presented there, and the context around how it was presented, um, but, um, the documentation does refer to an approved tourist facility, and there is the residential zone land adjacent to it. So, um, the linking of those two things for me, without having attended there, um, does, um, put an element of doubt in my mind about the level of community support, um, for the proposal. Now, I'd also refer to, um, the advice that was provided, the letter of support from the Chamber of Commerce. Have you got that there, Caitlin?

MS ELLIOT: Sorry.

MR HOLMES: Here we are. Found it. So, um - - -

5 MR HANN: What's the date of that?

MR HOLMES: That's the 19th of the 5th 2017, and it's - - -

MR HANN: Okay.

10

MR HOLMES: - - - included in the planning proposal as appendix (c).

MR HANN: Okay. Yep. Thanks.

15

MR HOLMES: And it says:

20 *The Chamber supports the development of a service centre as this is integral to the development of the whole project. The service centre would assist in branding Bulahdelah as a destination and provide economic benefits to our town by funnelling traffic into Bulahdelah, improving its economic viability and long term sustainability of town.*

Um, it also then goes on to say that, um:

25

The Chamber engaged in a public consultation process with two meetings held mid-2016 to gauge support for the project, including the service centre.

So to my mind there's clearly some linking between, um, the immediate proposal which we're considering today, which is - - -

30

MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - the highway service centre, and, um, the broader, um, proposal - - -

35

MR HANN: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - for the lands around that. The other element that I refer to as well, which I believe is resident – relevant is in the survey report from 2018 - - -

40

MR HANN: Mmm. Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - that was commissioned - - -

45

MR HANN: Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - and in – do we have another version of this?

MR HANN: There were two – there were two - - -

MR HOLMES: I thought the – the previous version - - -

5 MR HANN: There were two reports.

MR HOLMES: - - - of 2018. Yeah. Sorry. Got the wrong version.

10 MR HANN: Excuse me. One for Easter and one prior to that, wasn't it?

DR WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR HANN: There's one in a non-holiday period - - -

15 DR WILLIAMS: Yes.

MR HANN: - - - and there was one in Easter.

20 DR WILLIAMS: I've got the one for Easter. Is that the one for Easter?

MR HANN: No. It's the same as that one.

DR WILLIAMS: Ah, yeah. I think that's the only one - - -

25 MS ELLIOT: So what's this one?

MR HOLMES: So where it talks about – so in the study that was undertaken in 2017 - - -

30 MR HANN: This is the initial survey they did. Yeah.

MR HOLMES: The initial survey - - -

35 MS ELLIOT: Yeah. This point. Yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - that was undertaken.

MR HANN: 132 or so.

40 MR HOLMES: Um - - -

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

45 MR HOLMES: There's a question that's put to, um, the people interviewed at the time, which is:

What impact do you think a highway service centre will have on your local area?

5 Now, resident responses were 24 were negative, 27 were positive, and nine residents were neutral. And then it says:

10 *Participants who indicated that the service centre would have a negative impact generally reasoned that a service centre out of town would reduce the number of visitors to Bulahdelah. Some cited examples of other towns, um, where HSCs have been built nearby to demonstrate their point.*

Um, it then also says:

15 *Those that were positive about the HSC, highway service centre, viewed it as an opportunity to revitalise the town. Some resident – respondents expressed a desire to see change in Bulahdelah, acknowledging that a highway service centre could possibly be a risk to the town but that it was worth the risk.*

20 So it's a small sample - - -

MR HANN: Yeah.

25 MR HOLMES: - - - being something like 50 residents, but, again, um, for me it doesn't align with this idea that there's overwhelming support for the Bulahdelah Highway Service Centre that's proposed, and that is also, um, the reason why we recommended that strategic planning approach for it to properly engage with the community to understand their views and work out what the best way is forward.

30 MR HANN: Yeah. Understood. Okay. Peter, got any other particular queries?

DR WILLIAMS: No. I think that's all that I can think of at the moment.

35 MR HANN: Yeah. And I had, um – there's one other just as you were talking then - - -

DR WILLIAMS: Um - - -

40 MR HANN: Um, I guess it relate – yeah. My – my question is really the council have emphatically supported this and, ah, rejected, I guess, the – the arguments around inconsistency and talk about the intent of the policy. I just wonder whether you've got any particular comment on that. I mean, obviously we respect council's views. They're representing a – you know, in terms of the council – council hasn't voted. It's not as if it's just the executive, so take – giving that the degree of respect it deserves - - -

45 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: - - - I just wonder whether you've got any particular comment on that. And we're not – they've obviously presumably considered, ah, the overall position of the community here and come out strongly in support of this. So they – they clearly believe that it will have a positive impact. I just wonder whether you've got
5 particular insight into council's, um - - -

MS ELLIOT: No. I know obviously - - -

MR HANN: - - - change of mind between 2014 and 2018.
10

MR HOLMES: Yeah. Ah, look, obviously there's a different council on board now, but at the moment - - -

MR HANN: Okay. Not obviously to me - - -
15

MS ELLIOT: Being a merge council.

MR HANN: - - - but, you know, go - - -

MR HOLMES: So - - -
20

MR HANN: Oh, you mean in terms of the merge council.

MR HOLMES: Being a merge council.
25

MS ELLIOT: Yeah, yeah. Three - - -

MR HANN: Sure. No. Okay.

MR HOLMES: So you have – you have different representatives - - -
30

MR HANN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR HOLMES: - - - and, um, you know, clearly – clearly time has passed as well.
35 Um, as to those other questions, I think they'd really be questions for council around why those councillors may have voted the way they - - -

MR HANN: Okay.

MR HOLMES: - - - they have to support the proposal. Um - - -
40

MS ELLIOT: Yeah. No. I agree.

MR HOLMES: Yeah.
45

MR HANN: Yeah. Okay.

DR WILLIAMS: Sorry, John. Just thinking, there's another question, if I may. Have you got any other evidence as far as the – the economic wellbeing of the town now? I mean, there's – there's Oliver's, which keeps being mentioned.

5 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

DR WILLIAMS: And then the other argument is, well, we've got all these projections for – for car usage, travel usage to increase that up and down the Pacific Highway, and they will inevitably get a portion of that increased - - -

10

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - travel usage. Is there anything else that you can point to as sort of how the town is recovering from the bypass?

15

MS ELLIOT: They were the only ones that were presented in the planning proposal as such.

MR HOLMES: Yeah. Correct. So, um, it was our view in undertaking the assessment that it's up to the, um, planning proposal authority, so council - - -

20

DR WILLIAMS: Mmm.

MR HOLMES: - - - to convince us that the planning proposal has merit, and there wasn't enough evidence for us to be convinced that the planning proposal was consistent with that Ministerial Direction. So, as we've talked about, there are a number of – you mentioned hard evidence - - -

25

MR HANN: Yeah.

30

MR HOLMES: - - - the – the absence of that hard evidence, so, yeah, that's – that's how we answer that question.

MR HANN: I mean the only – the real – the only hard evidence we have on both sides is there's Oliver's and whatever that generates in terms of employment and – and, ah, the multiplier effect of – of spend, although that's not documented anywhere other than the fact that they've established - - -

35

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

40

MR HANN: - - - a business here. And the only other one is what we talked about earlier, which is the – the 60 jobs - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

45

MR HANN: - - - give or take, presumably, that's – which is a substantial number. That's pretty much it, isn't it, in terms of hard – hard data on – on what's – what's positive and - - -

5 MR HOLMES: That's right. In terms of hard data, I mean, they've presented those survey results, um, and some analysis that the EIA has done which, I guess, is the nearest thing we have to data go off, I think, so - - -

10 MR HANN: I should add to that, though, from the data in the Hill PDA report, ah, in terms of the – I guess it's the census information in terms of employment and – and population, ah, obviously it's been a dramatic effect from the by – you know, pre-bypass, and I think the figures were 2011 and then 2016 where - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

15

MR HANN: - - - you know, there's 80 less jobs of which, I think, were 19 that were related to, you know, fuel service, retail/tourism, you know. So a 10 or 12 per cent reduction, and obviously a huge reduction in traffic through the town, but we – we know that only a proportion of that stopped. The rest was just going through
20 Bulahdelah, albeit a bit slower than – than today.

MR HOLMES: Mmm.

25 MR HANN: So, ah, we do know obviously there's been – there was six fuel stations in Bulahdelah and there's – that's what we were told today, so - - -

MR HOLMES: Mmhmm.

30 MR HANN: - - - I'm just passing on information we – we were informed of - - -

DR WILLIAMS: And I'm not sure whether the - - -

MR HANN: - - - whereas there are now two.

35 MR HOLMES: Mmm.

MR HANN: Ah, there may – I thought there were four but apparently there was six and now there's two.

40 DR WILLIAMS: Which I think has been four closures, I think, were - - -

MR HANN: Yeah.

45 DR WILLIAMS: Yeah.

MR HANN: Yeah. And there were two hire boat operators and now there's one.

MR HOLMES: Okay.

MR HANN: So I guess you could say that's the – that's the level of hard data that – economic data we've – we've got.

5

MR HOLMES: Yeah. And did council, um, or the, ah, proponent say when those businesses closed? So are those closures that have happened recently or closures more related to the immediate shock of the - - -

10 MR HANN: I don't know - - -

MR HOLMES: - - - closure?

MR HANN: - - - Ben. I'm not - - -

15

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MR HANN: - - - sure of the timing of that.

20 DR WILLIAMS: We – we assumed that they were all post-bypass - - -

MR HOLMES: Yeah, yeah.

DR WILLIAMS: - - - but – but that's all - - -

25

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

MS ELLIOT: Yeah.

30 MR HOLMES: Yeah.

DR WILLIAMS: That's all – that's all we know. That's all we know.

MR HOLMES: Yeah.

35

MR HANN: All right.

DR WILLIAMS: Yeah.

40 MR HANN: Anything else, Peter?

DR WILLIAMS: No. I'm fine, John. Thanks.

MR HANN: Ben?

45

MR HOLMES: No. Nothing from me.

MR HANN: Have we left out something that we should have that you're aware of or – Helen - - -

MS H. MULCAHY: We're good.

5

MR HANN: - - - any - - -

MS MULCAHY: Mmm.

10 MR HANN: Okay. Interesting. Meeting closed, ah, Matthew. Thank you.

MATTER ADJOURNED at 1.17 pm INDEFINITELY