

'A2 deal hatched in 1997, consummated in 1999'

Six years on Jim gets his 'smoking gun'

By GARY CHIGWIDEN

It's taken six years, but Jim Mangleson reckons he's finally got the "smoking gun" he was looking for.

The "smoking gun", according to Mr Mangleson, is the release of a list containing the names of people who attended a crucial meeting at the Byron Bay Community Centre back in May, 1999.

It was that meeting organised by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA), said Mr Mangleson, that was the key to selecting the eventual route of the Pacific Highway upgrade between Brunswick Heads and Yelgun - and also sealed the fate of Lot 107 Shara Boulevard at Ocean Shores.

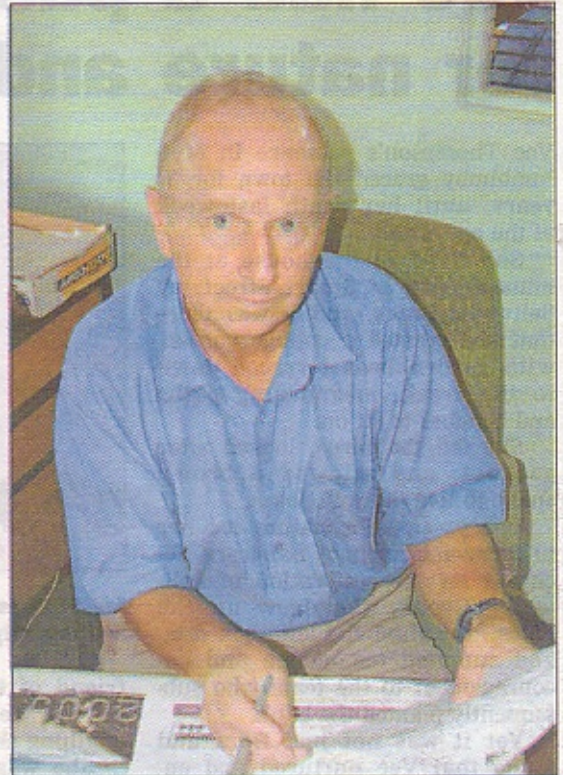
But it was a meeting, he said, that had no representation from the residents of Ocean Shore who eventually suffered the biggest impact when the A2 route was selected for the highway upgrade.

Since then, Mr Mangleson and the Ocean Shores Community Association (OSCA) tried unsuccessfully under the Freedom of Information Act to get the RTA to release details of who was at that meeting.

This changed several weeks ago when the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal ruled that OSCA could have access to the information.

But in its judgement, the tribunal ruled that the name of one of the people at the meeting not be released - but the name of the group being represented by the person was re-

RIGHT: Ocean Shores Community Association spokesman, Jim Mangleson, with the Freedom of Information documents which he says proves the RTA went through a pantomime of so-called community consultation over the route of the Pacific Highway upgrade



leased.

And that, says Mr Mangleson, is at the heart of OSCA's concerns.

While the list shows the names of representatives from seven environmental groups at the meeting, there was no name against 'Smokey Valley Residents'. Smokey Valley, said Mr Mangleson, was located just west of the existing highway at Ocean Shores and "has two houses in it".

Staggering

"This is proof positive that there has been no community involvement by the affected community," he said.

"The most staggering thing is that there is a person who must be very influential because he or she still managed to keep their name suppressed because of a fear of backlash from the affected Ocean Shores community.

"Ocean Shores which has been heavily impacted upon has 6000 residents.

"There are 1500 houses in the southern section alone.

"The non-public May 1999 meeting was the key to the whole exercise.

"After that they (RTA) went through the pantomime of so-called community consultation."

Mr Mangleson said the idea of selling a section of Lot 107 Shara Boulevard to the RTA as part of a compensatory habitat package to replace environmentally-sensitive land that would be lost to the highway upgrade was first floated at a meeting at Brunswick Heads in May, 1997 involving the RTA and environmental groups.

He said the "deal" was hatched at the 1997 meeting and "consummated" at the 1999 Byron Bay meeting.

To page 7

These were the groups at the meetings

The list provided to OSCA by the RTA under FOI shows the following groups represented at the May 11, 1999 meeting at Byron Bay:

BEACON - J Conlan
Byron Environment Centre - H Hartford and S Curry
Northern Rivers Wildlife Car-

ers - R Oehlman
Friends of the Koala - W Reynolds
Brunswick River Protection Committee - M Murray
Conservation Ecologists Association - R Koocynam
Conservation of North Ocean Shores - C Daoud, G Opit, S

and V Scanlon
Smokey Valley Residents

Those present at the May 13, 1997 meeting at Brunswick Heads were:
Tom Tabart - NSW Greens
Caldera Environment Centre
Chris Jones - Byron Environ-

ment Centre
Mitch Looyen - Byron Environment Centre
Mark McDermott - BEACON
Peter Hatton - RTA
Ken Oldfield - RTA
Dominic Fanning - Gunninah
Jo Moss - Sinclair Knight Merz

Six years on, Jim gets his 'smoking gun' on upgrade

From page 3

The RTA knew which route they would select, because had they gone the other way - the more westerly route J - they wouldn't have needed to be involved in a compensatory habitat package to replace wetland as none would have been affected, he said.

Mr Mangleson said it was clear that from the 1997 meeting on, everyone who opposed the A2 option had wasted their time.

He said OSCA had pursued the information under FOI to prove that there was no genuine community consultation and that the only consultation undertaken by the RTA was with a select environmental lobby group.

"We now have proof positive

that the only consultation that took place was between Green groups with a vested interest in securing Lot 107 as a compensatory habitat package and they have fought for five years to have their identity kept secret.

"The documentation shows this all started in 1997 and 1999 before any of the route options were given to the public."

Mr Mangleson said the information would be handed over to lawyers acting for the Brunswick Valley Sports Association and OSCA in the court fight over Byron Council's decision to sell Lot 107 to the RTA.

"The public have a right to know who made these decisions," he said.