



WET TROPICS MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Frequently asked questions about the Kuranda Range Road upgrade

What is the Wet Tropics Management Authority's involvement in the upgrade of the Kuranda Range Road?

The Authority is responsible for protection of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. It administers the legislation which governs any development within the Area. Following an application from the Department of Main Roads the Authority has:

1. recommended the rezoning of a section of the World Heritage Area to allow for the proposed road upgrade.
2. issued a permit for the Department of Main Roads to construct the upgrade within the World Heritage Area consistent with the conditions in the Commonwealth approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

What happens now that the Authority has issued a permit?

The Department of Main Roads can begin construction of the upgrade once the Queensland Government allocates a budget for the project. Main Roads has estimated that the upgrade will take 10 to 15 years to build.

Why is the road being upgraded?

The Department of Main Roads has recommended the road be upgraded to cope with increased use. The current road has safety problems and engineering deficiencies, cannot accommodate freight-efficient vehicles and has undesirable ecological impacts such as high levels of road kills, ecological fragmentation and lack of water connectivity.

What were the alternatives to the road?

The WTMA Board accepted the recommendation from the Department of Main Roads that the proposed upgrade was the most feasible alternative. Several alternatives were considered:

- Various tunnel options were considered too expensive to construct and operate and the existing road would still need to be maintained for safety and emergency purposes.
- Continued small upgrades of the existing road were considered to be inadequate to address safety and ecological concerns.
- Public transport and rail options were considered to be unsuitable because of the diverse destinations desired by travellers and development of the existing railway would be constrained by the topography and heritage listing of certain tunnels along the route.



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What public consultation has been done?

At the request of the Authority and the Australian Government, the Department of Main Roads undertook extensive public consultation to assess community views about their permit application for a road upgrade.

The Authority also undertook extensive public consultation for the proposed rezoning of the World Heritage Area between 7 December 2006 and 3 March 2007. Over 400 submissions were reviewed by the WTMA Board.

How will the road upgrade protect World Heritage values?

The WTMA Board decided that the upgrade of the existing road would, over time, provide significant improvements for the integrity and conservation of the World Heritage Area. The new road design incorporates 5km of bridging within the Area (about 42% of the total road). The bridging will allow the rainforest to grow underneath it and wildlife will be able to pass under the road safely, avoiding interaction with traffic. The uses of bridges and larger culverts means that watercourses will maintain more natural flows, allowing animals to move freely up and down streams and catchments.

What about the visual impacts of the road?

The Board acknowledged that some sections of the road will be visible against the existing landscape and diminish the aesthetic values of the World Heritage Area, particularly during construction. To soften the visual impacts, the Department of Main Roads has committed to:

- include design and revegetation strategies that allow for more canopy cover and vegetation connectivity.
- use construction material that will blend in with the surrounding vegetation and landscape.
- progressively rehabilitate redundant sections of the existing road.

The State Government has also promised to remove and rehabilitate the Kuranda to Smithfield powerline to partially offset the visual impacts of the road upgrade.

Did the WTMA Board consider impacts outside the Area?

The Board's jurisdiction is limited to the section of the upgrade within the World Heritage Area. However, before recommending that the rezoning for the upgrade should go ahead, the Board sought commitments to protect the ecological values in the adjacent Myola area. As a result Mareeba Shire Council has committed to implement planning controls to protect World Heritage values in the Myola area if the upgrade proceeds.



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What will the Authority's role be now?

The Authority's role will be to monitor the construction of the road and ensure that there are minimal impacts on the World Heritage Area. The Department of Main Roads has agreed to provide the Authority with independent monitoring of environmental impacts during the road's construction. Authority officers will be allowed on site for regular inspections.

What about rehabilitation during and after construction?

The Authority is aware that there will be short-term damage to the forests during the road's construction. However, the Board has decided that this damage is outweighed by the long term benefits for biodiversity. Rehabilitation of degraded areas will begin as soon as possible during the road's construction. It is envisaged that when the upgrade is completed rehabilitation will be well underway. This would include the land occupied by the Smithfield to Kuranda 22kv electricity transmission line. Once the upgrade is completed, it is anticipated that a significant portion of land will be able to be rezoned for conservation management.

What is the role of the Australian Government?

Australian Government approvals were needed for the road upgrade under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The Australian Minister for the Environment and Water Resources approved the construction of the road upgrade under the EPBC Act with specified conditions. These conditions include requirements to conserve 150ha of suitable cassowary habitat and to develop a national recovery plan for the endangered fern *Diplazium pallidum*.

For more information about the permit to build the road visit:

http://www.wettropics.gov.au/media/med_issues.html

or ring Campbell Clarke at WTMA on 07 4052 0542.

For more information about the road's design and construction visit:

www.kurandarangeupgrade.com