

Jason Wyeth

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to today. I will start, then I will hand over to Claire Kapernick and then to our final speaker Craig Kapernick.

Firstly, let me say that since the Hivesville to Proston branch line closed in 1993, property owners in this area have for 28 years utilised this land, going about their business and providing for their families.

So it is completely understandable that they may now be feeling some concern and anxiety about any possible future changes to the status quo.

I would also like to state from the beginning that on behalf of our association, the committee, and its members, we would not pursue this development if we thought for one minute that it would in any way harm anyone's livelihood or future business plans.

Whilst we understand that some property owners have lodged objections to this development, especially around the ongoing issue of farm biosecurity, and these are valid concerns that need to be addressed, we feel confident that by working together and seeking advice from experts in this field we can find a variety of robust and safe solutions that will mitigate this risk.

As an association, we are simply asking that you listen to all sides of this debate and make your decisions based on facts, research and experts and not on conjecture, innuendo and rumour.

Our research in recent weeks has only confirmed this view.

After reviewing several biosecurity risk management assessments from other Australian Rail Trails and from our conversations with Aus Organics Limited - the peak body for organic registrations in Australia - and emails from NASAA Certified Organics, a leading organics certifier, we are more confident than ever that solutions can be found that will benefit all parties.

I would now like to address the issues that farmers raised recently about **Privacy, vandalism, trespass, theft and maintenance costs vs income.**

- a. I would like to start with the issues of vandalism and trespass. To our association's knowledge, in the almost four years since the South Burnett Rail Trail (SBRT) opened there has not been a single complaint about trespass, theft or vandalism of properties. Over the same period of we have had very few complaints to our association about illegal trail usage, with only 2 reports of trail bikes accessing the trail early on after opening.

Further to this:

- i. Numerous studies have concluded that rail trails do not generate crime. Research and anecdotal evidence suggest the development of rail trails tends to reduce crime by cleaning up the landscape and attracting people who use the trail for legitimate reasons, such as recreation and transport.

Further backing up this statement:

- ii. There have been no reports of trespassing, theft or vandalism on the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail (Victoria) since the establishment of the trail. Similarly, the Collie to Darkan Rail Trail (Western Australia) has had no incidents of crime
 - iii. In the Clare Valley (South Australia), the Riesling Trail has had only 2 incidents along it in over 25 Years of operation. And finally:
 - iv. The Linville-Blackbutt section of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail has had 2 incidents simply involving trail bike access in over 10 years. This is despite the fact that large sections of this trail are unfenced
- b. The Feasibility Study on pages 32-33 also highlighted a number of options to assist in preventing crime along the Rail Trail corridor. These options have been tried and proven effective on many Rail Trails throughout Australia:

- c. The Feasibility Study on P33-34 also highlighted a number of solutions to offset any Privacy Issues. Once again. I would like to state that these solutions have been implemented many times on many different Rail Trails and have proven to be effective over time.
- d. On the same page, the Feasibility Study also gives dozens of possible and proven solutions for everything from biosecurity issues to construction impacts to splitting farm paddocks, chemical spraying, fencing and various trail management Issues

Finally, I would urge councillors to contact property owners along the SBRT and talk to them about their experiences with these issues.

Many that we have spoken to, whilst initially against the SBRT development, now see the benefit that it brings to our region and have had no issues with the aforementioned concerns.

From my own research, this change of heart seems to be a common occurrence with land owners boarding rural Rail Trails.

I would now like to address the issues raised about maintenance costs vs income:

1. A full construction costs breakdown is in the Feasibility Study. However, I would like to firstly point out that. The Feasibility Study allows \$ 345,800 for
 - Single and double fencing of the entire rail trail route
 - Grids and gates and other structures
 - Safety, directional and warning signage and
 - Privacy screening

2. The predicted income from the finished Rail Trail has been estimated at \$786,960, with an estimated 3500-4500 extra visitors coming to our area per year. I would like to point out that this dollar figure is for the entire South Burnett Region, with the bulk of this income from tourist staying an extra night or nights in the South Burnett due to this development.

3. Maintenance costs need to be considered in any discussion, as any maintenance costs will fall back on the ratepayers of the South Burnett. The cost for maintaining this Rail Trail have been estimated at \$37,080 per year.

Our association would like to point out **that even if the income stated earlier is only half of what is predicted (at \$400,000) this still represents a 10-fold return on maintenance investment for the ratepayers of the South Burnett.**

In closing:

This development stands to bring much-needed tourist dollars, not only to the Hivesville and Proston areas but to the entire South Burnett Region, giving tourists another reason to spend more time in these locations.

This development adds a valuable asset to our growing cycling/adventure tourism attractions in the South Burnett, and it will encourage visitors to our region to possibly “stay another day” putting much needed tourist dollars into our drought-affected small business community.

Further to the economic advantages that this Rail Trail would bring, other flow on benefits would include:

- Health benefits to local communities (physical and mental)
- Liveability benefits certainly for Hivesville and Proston
- Environmental and cultural benefits
- Educational benefits and opportunities

Furthermore, a development such as this “fits” very well within multiple sections of the South Burnett Regional Council’s own Draft Corporate Plan 2021-2026 under the following sections:

- Enhancing Liveability and Lifestyle- EC1, EC11
- Providing Key Infrastructure for Our Towns and Villages- IN5
- Growing our Region’s Economy and Prosperity- GR2, GR4, GR13

Finally, I would like to read a passage from one the letters of support that our association has received:

The existing 'Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail' is a valuable asset to the South Burnett region for community health and well-being, and is a popular recreation activity that generates tourism and therefore employment opportunities. I consistently meet and talk with tourists on and around the rail trail, who are staying in local accommodation, visiting friends or family or travelling through with caravans.

I also know many farmers and property owners along the trail who have nothing but positive comments to make about the trail - in many cases they utilise it themselves. I've heard zero complaints from farmers who border the current rail trail as it exists in harmony with its surroundings, and it could be objectively argued helps improve upon its aesthetics.

A simple search of the internet and social media demonstrates that the growing rail trail network throughout Queensland and Australia is the envy of many other nations. A section from Hivesville to Proston would only serve to value-add to this important community and tourism infrastructure, helping build local economic resilience, plus improved health and well-being for local residents into the future

As South Burnett Regional Council representatives and leaders in our communities I would urge you to support this project and to approach concerns raised with an open mind, utilising facts from relevant government departments and experts in the field of rail trail development and biosecurity.

Claire Kapernick

I would like to thank the South Burnett Regional Council for this opportunity to speak in favour of the Hivesville to Proston Rail Trail – because that is what this is: an opportunity.

- It's an opportunity to expand tourism in our region.
- It's an opportunity to enhance the liveability of our area.
- It's an opportunity to improve the physical health and mental well-being of our residents.
- It's an opportunity to create a lasting facility to benefit the South Burnett for generations to come.

And at the moment it's an opportunity going begging due to the opposition of a few vocal opponents who have never tried our existing South Burnett Rail Trail.

They have never taken the time to chat with other locals out on the trail who they may never have crossed paths with in their regular day to day activities.

They have never taken the time to chat with visitors like Paul who I met on Monday, who thinks the facilities of our current trail are incredible and he can't wait to come back and do the whole thing from Kingaroy to Kilkivan.

Imagine how long he would stay if the Hivesville to Proston Rail Trail was a reality.

Years ago, when the original rail line was proposed, a group of forward thinking locals could see the benefits for future generations and grabbed the opportunity in front of them with both hands.

I would like to think that we are as forward thinking as our South Burnett forebears and can grab the opportunity that's currently in front of us and take a positive step forward for the betterment of the economic, social, physical and mental well-being of the South Burnett community as a whole now and into the future.

Craig Kapernick

We are asking the council for your in-principle support for the Hivesville to Proston Rail Trail.

This would be a valuable piece of infrastructure that can provide numerous benefits to the community as a whole.

The increased business due to tourism has been clearly stated in the independent report on the trail. It should be pointed out that this will particularly help the town of Proston by leveraging the existing dam traffic which currently has little reason to enter and spend time in the town itself.

What I believe is a more significant benefit of this trail however is the role it plays in the physical and mental health of the local community. The South Burnett Rail Trail (SBRT) has shown that it has increased participation of local

residents in walking and cycling solely due to being a safe, well suited facility. Many of these are older residents and parents with young children.

While hard to quantify, the mental health benefits are critical.

As a farmer myself who has a fairly socially isolated occupation, and of an age and level of ball skills that makes many sporting groups out of reach, the SBRT provides a community contact and support that would not have been otherwise available.

The opportunity to talk with others after good weeks or bad weeks does more for my mental well being than many of the intentionally targeted initiatives that have been tried.

Suicide prevention is one the council's key priorities and this is how it can be addressed.

The small number of opponents to this proposed project have raised a number of reasons against it so I would like to address those.

Firstly, this is state owned land and it always has been. I have travelled on this train line as a child and my father recalls watching steam trains start spot fires as they built up steam to attack some of the steeper grades. Thankfully this is unlikely to happen with a bicycle trail. The majority of the landholders simply border the line in the same way we all border a road, and approximately 5 properties have the line running through them, in the same way many of us own farms that sit either side of a roadway. No one is losing land.

Regarding the complainant who stated in the media that it may threaten his EU certification (*Burnett Today 13/1/2021*), this certification requires refraining from using hormonal growth promotants (HGP) in cattle (*Meat and Livestock Australia*). The likelihood of a rail trail somehow causing a steer to be caught in a head bale in a yard and having a HGP accidentally applied under the skin in its ear is not strong. This is fearmongering.

We have contacted two organic certification bodies, (*Australian Organics Ltd and NASAA Certified Organic*) as Jason mentioned who have said that a rail trail would not harm certification. But they did say that as the existing corridor is owned by someone else it may need to be excluded anyway.

In terms of biosecurity, after consultation with biosecurity advisors (*Agforce*) the main issue of concern would be weeds. The fact that this would be a contained corridor means the probability of a new weed being introduced and spread is a comparable risk to that imposed by roads and driveways. Having both sides fenced and a defined pathway will keep this risk very low. Improved council and landholder access will actually enhance monitoring and control.

The likelihood of ticks being spread is again low as horses are considered low risk animals for cattle ticks and cyclists I would think to be pretty low as well.

Any landholder who wishes to maintain a tick free status within a "ticky" area would simply need to treat the rail corridor in the same way as all of their other boundaries with neighbours and roadways – all of which would provide as much of a risk or more so than a fenced rail corridor.

Where landholders who own land either side of the corridor are concerned, each case will have its own solution.

If automatic access is needed across the trail, a short section of unfenced trail with gates at either end is an option, just like a roadway or creek crossing.

For the most part, a fully fenced corridor will enhance land use providing more paddocks for spelling pasture and an all-weather lane way for movement of stock. It is in the interest of both landholders and the rail trail to continue to graze the trail from time to time as this keeps vegetation at a suitable height.

It could be proposed that as part of the development, farmers be given support with establishing new watering points to further enhance their properties creating a win-win situation.

In all of the other rail trails established throughout the country, including our existing South Burnett rail trail, initial fears have been shown to be unfounded.

We ask that council step back and look at what is known about the rail trails that exist and how well they work and provide your in-principle support. This one will be no different. They are an environmentally friendly, low maintenance, low impact facility that benefits the community at large and harms no one. They promote tourism, business, physical health, mental health and foster a sense of community. **How can we say no to this?**