

Information on the proposed Cooroy Broiler Farm presented to the Noosa Shire Councillors

2 January 2014

Application No: MCU12/0184 & ERA12/0087

Development Type:

Development Permit for Material Change of Use of Premises (Animal Husbandry Type 2 - Intensive)

Development Permit for Material Change of Use of Premises for an Environmentally Relevant Activity (ERA 4 - Poultry Farming)

136 Top Forestry Road, Ridgewood QLD 4563

Prepared for:

Mayor Noel Playford

Cr Tony Wellington

Cr Bob Abbot

Cr Sandy Bolton

Cr Frank Pardon

Cr Joe Jurisevic

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Submitted by:

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Summary of the Proposal

This development application was presented to SCRC on 14 November 2012.

Because the developer did not have proper zoning of the property, the application for new zoning from Agriculture Type 1 to Agriculture Type 2 (Intensive farming) was sought from the state government resulting in a five-month delay.

The application was first advertised to the public on 15 May 2013 and submissions on the proposal closed on 4 June 2013.

People living on Top Forestry Road did not see any DA signs on the property, so were unable to make properly made submissions.

This issue is currently subject to legal investigation.

The proposal

The applicant is seeking approval to level ridge-tops to construct eight 100 metre by 16.5 metre sheds which will each hold around 34,000 meat chickens for a six-week growing cycle. Approximately 1.5 million birds will be reared annually. These sheds will have earth floors covered by 45 mm of sawdust litter that is changed when necessary, then removed and composted before spreading on the avocado orchard on the property.

While noise, dust, odour and visual amenity are issues of great concern to local property owners, the wider community will be affected by potential watercourse pollution and heavy vehicle traffic. The annual 1,460 semi trailers (including B Doubles) and other associated vehicles using the winding sealed and unsealed rural roads will pose a danger to residents and tourists. This is especially dangerous for those who have to travel the Cooroy-Belli Creek Road, which recently has seen fatalities, with wide, heavy vehicles. Also, the township of Cooroy, currently struggling to cope with heavy vehicle through-traffic, will experience further congestion.

This massive project is being promoted as a complementary operation to the existing avocado orchard, but an annual total of 7040 m³ of shed waste can not be spread on the steep slopes of the farm, since poultry litter is light and will wash off the ground easily, rapidly entering the adjacent Blackfellow Creek and potentially the Mary River System.

Partial list of amendments to the application

Orchard changed from a hobby to commercial

Traffic consultant stated that, since the orchard is to be a hobby, there would be no trips generated from orchard produce. This was later changed to include extra vehicle trips after council requested further details.

Fruit tree numbers

Underestimated in the original application which led to developer deciding to plant an additional 3000 trees. No amendments to the shed litter spreading rates to accommodate the change in tree types from mature to young.

Rates of shed litter application

The revisions of spreading rates of shed litter made calculations of growth rates and the ability of the trees to process the manure difficult to assess.

Composting methodology

The original application noted a 280 m² banded composting area, which was finally increased to a massive 5,273 m².

Removal of shed litter from the farm

Original plans called for 20 percent of litter to be used on the farm, but subsequent amendments claimed all litter would be utilized, then again changed to allow for excess litter be sold and removed from the site.

Employment prospects

Claims by the developer that 5 or even 10 full-time jobs would be created once the sheds were in operation, when evidence from similar-sized farms suggests two people could operate such a farm.

Change in shed cycles

Broiler shed production changed from a staged bird removal policy to a synchronised operation, which meant more concentrated levels of noise and odour, and greater traffic issues.

Change in shed cycles

Floor litter depth reduced from 100mm to 45 mm, and complete shed litter removal after each rotation changed from complete to partial, with litter reuse at manager's discretion

Composting times

Composting times of 4-5 weeks stated were less than half that of industry standards for full composting and therefore thorough treatment of the pathogens.

Odour impacts

Changes to odour modeling that neglected to take into account houses on the developer's property.

Vehicular traffic and roads

Changes to vehicle movements, vehicle types, and road traffic affects on the use of heavy vehicles on inappropriate unsealed and sealed rural roads.

Council meetings to date

Before the Council meeting of 14 November 2013 SRCC Planning department recommended refusal of the development application

It is concluded that the proposed poultry farm does not meet The Noosa Plan provisions. While the site is zoned Rural, the access and location is not suitable for such an intensive animal husbandry use. The proposed development does not achieve sufficient separation distances from the surrounding residents, so as to avoid adverse odour impacts on residents' amenity. The applicant has not provided sufficient details on the potential emissions from manure stockpiles and manure spreading to demonstrate that the poultry farm complies with the Queensland odour guidelines for rural zoned land. The closest houses to the site are also at risk of distinct odour impacts at times, with the applicant's report failing to address one of the sensitive receiver locations.

The proposal will also generate significant traffic movements, impacting on the traffic safety of Top Forestry Road, with the applicants proposed improvements not sufficient to provide the necessary safe environment. It is neither feasible nor reasonable to condition for the developer to construct the necessary improvements to this road, given the topography and the extent of works required to achieve a reasonable standard. Traffic movements are also likely to adversely impact on residents' amenity due to dust and noise generation on Top Forestry Road. Collection of birds is also likely to be through the night during the peak batch cycle, affecting residents living along the route, particularly the residential streets in the Cooroy township.

It is, therefore, recommended that the application be refused.

14 November 2013

SCRC Council defers decision to next council meeting

Councillors from Sunshine Coast Regional Council (SCRC) voted on 14 November to defer making a decision on the application until their regular meeting at Tewantin Council Chambers on 12 December.

Councillor Wellington opened the debate with a motion seeking to accept the planning officers' recommendation to refuse the application. He spoke on behalf of local residents affected by the noise, odour and dust, and by the prospect of unacceptably dangerous daily vehicle travel. He also said that Cooroy residents should not be subject to day and night truck movements that would travel right past their doors.

Councillor Hungerford then proposed a motion that the application be approved with some conditions, including minor road works, to be managed by the Council CEO. He was sure that the application fitted that the Council's recent Rural Futures Strategy, although this was contested.

Councillor Green then proposed an amendment to the Hungerford motion that

called for more information on contentious aspects of the development application, and that these be presented at the last council meeting for the year on 12 December. This motion was passed by an overwhelming majority.

The motion

That Council defer consideration of application No. MCU12/0184 to the next Council meeting and request the applicant to provide the following additional information:

1. Total vehicle trips including details of size of vehicles, purpose of trip, time of trip and number of trips per day.
2. Feasibility of requirements to provide to seal to 50m in front of affected properties on Top Forestry Road or to enter into an Infrastructure Agreement with Council.
3. Composting and stockpiling methodology including data on management of emissions during these processes.
4. Water quality management particularly addressing potential impacts from use of shed waste and composting material for fertilising the orchard and any associated run off.
5. Feasibility on reduction of size and number of sheds.

12 December 2013

Broiler farm application decision again deferred by SCRC Council

On 12 December a packed gallery heard passionate debate on the application which ended in Sunshine Coast Council voting 7 to 4 to defer the West Cooroy broiler farm development application. This means it will come before the new Noosa Council for a decision some time in the new year. The SCRC planning staff report on the developer's response to the 12 November request for further information again recommended refusal.

Tony Wellington again presented a strong case against the application, and Councillor Dickson argued that the new Noosa Council had the right to decide this issue, given that earlier in the year residents had voted to de-amalgamate and therefore take responsibility for their own planning issues. And Councillor Robinson put the case for deferral, noting that impacts on the local community, including traffic through town, were quite unacceptable.

The motion to again defer the application for further information called for additional details on the proposed infrastructure agreement and further odour modelling, but since the application (and its many revisions) continues to present unacceptable vehicle movement data, traffic safety solutions, storm water issues, visual amenity and neighbour separation issues, the development application should be refused.

Summary of the reasons the broiler farm application should be refused

Primary production in line with the “Noosa Plan” should be encouraged.

The spirit and motivation of the district’s farmers, large and small, is improving and the local economy is beginning to buzz again after the Traveston Dam debacle.

Many farmers in the area now use sustainable methods including rotational grazing and off-stream watering to protect and enhance the sensitive environment, while improving carrying capacity.

Large sums have been spent on achieving this, with funds spent on personnel and materials, and assistance from local council, state, and federal funding.

Farm finances are typically on a knife edge and any reduction in property value could be very critical as it hits bank facilities especially after the GFC.

Risks to neighbouring farmers

- 22 properties between the proposed broiler farm and the Mary River junction are using Blackfellow Creek water in some way or another.
- Cattle will be exposed to all the pollution risks identified in the objections, including the risk of botulism from the shed litter with added losses and /or costs of protection.
- Wild dogs will be drawn to a broiler farm, so calves will be lost, expensive baiting programmes will be needed, and the natural ecological balance disturbed.
- Lifestyle farmers are economically significant to Cooroy, and they have little resilience to changes in environmental and economic conditions.

The Environment

- North and South Blackfellow Creek join to the west of Bellbird Homestead, flow into Belli Creek, then to the Mary River and out to the reef.
- The creeks and waterways are home to endangered frog species, the Giant Barred Frog and the Cascade Treefrog, as well as the vulnerable Tusk Frog, and are marked as significant riparian corridors on RE maps.
- Many landowners have been doing extensive work to protect the creeks and gullies against the threats of erosion, noxious weeds, and introduced animal species.
- Many expert bodies and programmes have been involved in helping with this – Landcare, SCC(VCA), MRCCC, BMRG, Reef Rescue, Koala Foundation, Healthy Habitats and more.

- The high rainfall in the area and the exposed position of the ridge site means a very high risk of pollutants being carried down into Blackfellow Creek North by stormwater runoff, bunded area overflow, and high winds.
- There is a high risk of all the good remedial work being undone, and endangered species put at risk.
- No Environmental Impact Statement has yet been undertaken.

Economics

- The site is a very unsuitable one from an infrastructure viewpoint – it is steep, has poor access, and the huge amount of earth moving required means it is not only costly, but also will create an unsightly agglomeration of sheds perched on ridge tops that can never be disguised and which, along with associated infrastructure, will change the form of the rural landscape.
- The project contradicts many of the state government guidelines for such chicken farm operations, including access, distance from chicken processing works, and gradient litter spreading recommendations.
- The value-adding in the meat production chain is not retained in the district, since the processor, Inghams Enterprises, which provides the chicks, feed, transport, and chicken processing, is based in Brisbane.
- Despite employment claims in the submissions, comparison to other similar-sized operations suggests only two full-time employees are necessary.
- The applicant's calculations show that the avocado trees will not take all the shed waste, so much of this will need to be trucked out as an unbalanced agricultural fertiliser.
- Given the capital investment required and the energy and other costs involved we cannot see how this project can be at all profitable.
- Therefore, the applicant may encounter financial difficulty funding all the protective measures promised. If the venture were to fail, a toxic and dangerous site will be left with no funding for the clean up.
- Compared to the potential losses to landowners and their spending ability, this is a high risk project that brings little or no financial benefit to the district.

Traffic

- The danger of allowing semi-trailers and B-doubles on the narrow, winding roads is an issue that locals are particularly fearful of due to the dangerous conditions ordinary car drivers experience, and because of the many incidents of fatal and other road accidents.
- The local sealed and unsealed roadways are very inappropriate for the proposed traffic and heavy vehicles.
- Council and local residents will have to bear the maintenance costs of these roads.

- The Designated Cycle Training route on the Cooroy-Belli Creek Road adds to the risks.
- School bus, waste collection, and postal routes on the roads add to the potential for accidents.
- Large volumes of dust will be created from heavy traffic on the unsealed road.
- Native wildlife road kill will be increased.
- Cooroy residential streets, with inappropriate roundabouts and blind road bends, are on the transport route.
- Heavy vehicle trips will be all hours of the day and night.

Tourism

- Our future as a Noosa hinterland tourism attraction, along with the economic benefits to Cooroy, will disappear if the broiler farm is approved. In summer, broiler farms produce continual odour, noise and dust, and once this becomes known, our district will become a no-go zone for travellers and visitors seeking a quiet country drive and/or recreational pursuits.
- Cooroy-Belli Creek road is a designated cycle training road and is used year-round by recreational and racing cyclists training for races, including the annual Noosa Triathlon.
- Top Forestry Road is a known bird-watching spot, and No 9 on the Noosa Bird Trail Map.
- Top Forestry Road, West Cooroy State Forest is on the Sunshine Coast Council Mountain Bike Riding Map.
- West Cooroy State Forest is popular with locals for bushwalks and is used by recreational horseriders on a regular basis.

Health Issues

Noise

- Caused by reversing trucks, extractor fans, feed delivery systems, bird noise, machinery, pumps, etc, noise is a major concern to the hundreds of residents up to 8 km from the site, both day at night.
- The transport route through the town of Cooroy passes a school and a retirement village as well as quiet residential streets with nearly 200 residences.

Odour

- Movement and storage of shed litter
- Cleaning out shed litter between cycles .
- Turning of composted litter.

- Application of stored or treated shed waste to the property.
- Transportation of treated or untreated wastes off site.
- Emitted from the sheds via extractor fans.

Dust

- Huge extractor fans discharge dust carrying particles of organic and inorganic origin.
- The organic component consists of dried faecal matter, feathers, plant matter, bacteria, endotoxins and fungi.
- The dust will contaminate drinking water; people in this area rely on tank water.
- Inhalation of fine inorganic dust has the potential to exacerbate asthmatic conditions and cause lung inflammation.

Summary

- Intensive farming is incompatible with The Noosa Plan.
- There will be long-term detrimental effects on the local economy.
- Hinterland property values will be adversely affected.
- Low-impact farming and rural lifestyle owners will be disadvantaged.
- Heavy vehicles are inappropriate for narrow, unsealed, winding local roads.
- Noise, odour and dust will affect the health of many people.
- Endangered species are at risk from water pollution and wild dogs.
- Farmers downstream will have their water and livestock affected.