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DEEP-SEA PORT IN NORTH OF STATE.

REPORT OF EXPERT COMMITTEE.

On 3rd January, 1945, the Premier of New South Wales set up a Committee:—

- (i) To examine all available information relating to the question of the development of a deep-sea port on the North Coast and the provision of additional rail and/or road facilities to such port, and, after making such additional enquiries as may be found to be necessary, to furnish a report and recommendation to the Government.
- (ii) To take into consideration in the preparation of its report and recommendation the following principal factors, namely—
 - (a) the suitability, from an engineering point of view, of each site suggested for the purpose of a deep-sea port;
 - (b) the possibilities of economic and adequate rail and road connection of each with the existing transport system;
 - (c) the extent of potential hinterland rural development that each would offer; and
 - (d) the possibilities of secondary industrial development in each instance.
- (iii) To furnish its report and recommendation within a period of six months from the date of its appointment.

On 11th October, 1945, the period for submission of the report was extended to the end of 1945.

Personnel of Committee.

The Members of the Committee were:—

- Mr. D. Craig, Commissioner for Main Roads (Chairman).
- Mr. J. M. Main, Chief Engineer, Department of Public Works.
- Mr. W. H. Corry, Assistant Chief Traffic Manager (out-door), Department of Railways.
- Dr. H. J. Hynes, Chief of the Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics, Department of Agriculture.
- Mr. A. Max Allen, Director of Reconstruction and Development, Premier's Department.

The Committee met at intervals throughout the year and collected all available reports on the development of the northern area of the State, called for reports from Regional Development Committees, Government Authorities and other interested parties. It also traversed the greater part of the area which would be served by a deep-sea port with railway and road connections and inspected possible sites of a deep-sea port at Byron Bay, Ballina, Clarence River, Woolgoolga and Coff's Harbour.

During the itinerary, the alternative sites and railway and road communication to the Tablelands were discussed with the Namoi, New England, Richmond-Tweed and Clarence Regional Development Committees and other bodies.

A very comprehensive report has now been submitted to the Government and the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee are set out hereunder:—

CONCLUSIONS.

From the reports and evidence submitted and from an inspection of the area which would be served by a deep-sea port and railway connection to the Tablelands, the Committee has reached the following conclusions:—

1. The area which could be served by a deep-sea port on the North Coast would extend from the coast on the east to the Barwon River on the west and from the Queensland border on the north to a line from Port Macquarie to Mogul (on the Barwon River) on the south.
2. Production within the area which would be served by a deep-sea port, and railway connection to the Tablelands is capable of being greatly increased and such transport facilities are essential for full development of the whole area.
3. With the development of the area and establishment of industries, following provision of a deep-sea port and railway connection, the population within the area would substantially increase.
4. So that the deep-sea port and railway connection may be ultimately justified, every possible encouragement will require to be given to the development of the whole area served in order that not only will primary production be greatly increased but also many industries using raw products from the area will be established.
5. Until industries are well established the only exports through the port would be primary products. A limited tonnage only of imports from overseas could be expected in the initial stages.
6. A considerable portion of the tonnage of primary produce which could make use of a railway and deep-sea port would be obtained west of the Dividing Range and would consist mainly of wool, wheat and meat. Other surplus commodities produced in the area of influence include butter, sugar, maize, bananas, timber and certain minerals.
7. The maximum area will require to be brought under the influence of the scheme and encouragement given to diversion of products to the new deep-sea port. In this regard, consideration may have to be given to the adoption of suitable railway freight and port charges.
8. A railway from the coast to the Tablelands would assist the exchange of produce and live-stock, particularly during periods of regional drought.

9. Primary production of the area can be further increased and economically transported on the road system (which is being continuously improved) to the existing railways. However, a new east-west line, while primarily required as a trunk line for transport of heavy tonnage of produce to a deep-sea port, would assist materially in developing the area through which it would pass and would encourage decentralisation of industries.

10. The area at present served by railways radiating from Moree to Mungindi, Boggabilla and Inverell, is almost as well served by the existing railway from Moree to Newcastle as it would be by a railway line to the coast. The only North Coast port which would be closer to Moree is that at Iluka near the mouth of the Clarence River with a direct railway connection to Inverell. This factor must have an important bearing on the choice of the deep-sea port and railway connection.

11. A deep-sea port at Byron Bay would cost substantially more than a port at Ballina, without giving any increased service, and need not be further considered in the final analysis.

12. A deep-sea port at Ballina near the mouth of the Richmond River with railway through Casino to Tenterfield, thence to Glen Innes and Inverell is regarded as being too far north to adequately serve a large area. The trade of the port would consequently be restricted. The main advantage of this scheme lies in its relatively low estimated cost.

13. A deep-sea port in the vicinity of Iluka on the north side of the Clarence River near its entrance with a railway line as direct as practicable to Inverell would serve the maximum area and would best promote development of the area as a whole.

This scheme possesses the following advantages over all other schemes:—

- (a) The mouth of the Clarence River is most centrally situated by sea between the deep-sea ports of Newcastle and Brisbane.
- (b) The Clarence River is most centrally situated in the richer north-east area of the State where there ultimately will be a closely settled population.
- (c) The Clarence River would provide a harbour superior to any other of the alternative ports.
- (d) Works required to provide port facilities can be carried out at an estimated cost only slightly higher than the lowest estimate at any other alternative site.
- (e) There is an extensive area of waterway for extension of port facilities in the future.
- (f) There are potential industrial towns with an existing nucleus of population along the river as far as Grafton.

- (g) The distance by railway into the Richmond and Tweed areas is comparatively short.
- (h) With the port at Iluka, ample area is available for establishment of a large industrial town at a suitable elevation within ten miles of the port.
- (j) There are suitable sites for both airport and seaplane base.
- (k) The port can be connected to the wheat- and wool-growing areas of the west with Moree as a centre by a shorter railway than to any other port between Brisbane and Sydney.
- (l) The railway would provide the best and most direct railway route between the north-east and north-west for interchange of products between the coastal area and the hinterland.
- (m) The direct railway route would promote development in the immediate vicinity of the line to as great an extent as would any other railway connection from the coast to the Tablelands. The principal drawback to this route is the high cost of the railway.
- (n) The port would be relatively close to the Water Conservation and Hydro-electric potentialities of the Clarence River and its tributaries.

14. A deep-sea port in the vicinity of Iluka on the north side of the Clarence River near its entrance with a railway through Grafton to Ebor and Guyra to Inverell could be constructed at lower cost as regards the railway than the cost of a railway on a direct route.

The Railway Department favours the Ebor route as it claims the potential development in its vicinity is probably greater than in the vicinity of the proposed direct route and the estimated cost of construction of the railway is much less.

The additional distance of 53 miles, however, would leave the area with Moree as a railway centre outside the influence of the deep-sea port on the North Coast thereby greatly reducing the prospective tonnage of produce through the port.

15. A deep-sea port at any point between the entrance of the Clarence River and Grafton would involve heavy dredging to obtain required depth of water and subsequent maintenance dredging would also be heavy. The cost involved is such that it would not bear comparison with other schemes.

16. A deep-sea port at Woolgoolga has little in its favour and would involve heavy railway works to connect it with the North Coast Railway.

17. A deep-sea port at Coff's Harbour involves the heaviest and most costly constructional works of any of the ports considered. There is an existing railway from Coff's Harbour to Glenreagh and Dorrigo to which a new railway could be

connected to Guyra and Inverell. The existing Glenreagh-Dorrigo line, however, is not suitable for heavy through traffic and a new line would require to be constructed at heavy cost. Altogether, this scheme possesses no advantages (other than that the railway is slightly shorter), over a port at Iluka with railway through Grafton, Ebor and Guyra to Inverell. In addition, the distance from Coff's Harbour to Inverell would be 22 miles longer than the direct route from Iluka to Inverell.

18. The estimated costs of the alternative schemes set out in the report can be taken as being approximate only. They are not based on complete engineering investigations, nor have final surveys and designs been carried out. However, they are assumed to be relatively accurate within reasonable limits.

19. The whole project of port and railway construction will require to be regarded as of a major developmental character as it is unlikely that the revenues will meet working expenses until such time as both primary and secondary production of the area have been greatly expanded and markets established for its products.

20. The volume of trade passing over the railway and through the deep-sea port, will depend in the final analysis on the fullest use of the facilities provided and the encouragement of overseas traders in the use of the port. At present there are so many unknown factors which will have a bearing on the tonnage that its total amount cannot be estimated.

21. There is a need in Australia to step up output per man by increasing the horse-power per man which he uses in his productive effort. The increased horse-power can be in the form of electric or other power and in the greater use of plant and machinery. Potential power supplies exist in the area to be served by the port and railway which if developed and applied energetically both to primary and secondary production, results in volume could be substantial.

22. The area which would come under the influence of a deep-sea port and railway is covered by four regions. Co-ordination of the planning by Regional Development Committees is important and there is unlimited scope for the application of scientific planned development of the subject area.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

(a) That the establishment of a deep-sea port in the vicinity of Iluka on the north side of the Clarence River near its entrance, with a direct trunk railway connection to Inverell, be accepted in principle.

The railway by direct route from Iluka would cross and junction with the North Coast Railway near Dilkoon Station and continue westward crossing the Clarence River upstream from Copmanhurst. From there it would proceed to the vicinity of Glen Innes, where it would cross and junction with the Main Northern Railway and again continue westward to Inverell; the exact location of the railway to be determined after complete engineering investigations.

(b) That the Public Works Department and the Railway Department be authorised to complete engineering investigations and to locate the works and carry out final surveys and prepare designs of works referred to in (a) to a stage which will enable quantities of work to be computed, and to prepare estimates of costs based on these quantities.

(c) That if the total estimate of cost does not substantially exceed the present tentative estimate of £14,486,000 on which the Committee's conclusions have been based, then the scheme be finally adopted.

(d) That if the total estimate of cost proves to be substantially higher than that stated in (c) then the matter be further reviewed.

In releasing the above report the Premier, Mr. McKell, stated that he appointed the Committee in conformity with the promise he made at the last general elections. The Government's determination to work towards the establishment of another sea-port on the State's vast coast-line was in conformity with its policy of decentralisation. The estimated cost of the project is £14,486,000—£10,761,000 for the rail connection, which would pass through several miles of country, and £3,725,000 for the establishment of the port. The Premier indicated that the Government would give the report careful consideration.
