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***Coffs Harbour Highway Planning
Coffs Harbour Section***

***Socio-Economic Assessment
Working Paper No 6***

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Executive Summary

The Socio-Economic Assessment Working Paper has been prepared to compile details of socio-economic characteristics of the Coffs Harbour area, document the issues and outcomes of the community involvement process and to compare the socio-economic impacts of the options. A socio-economic assessment of the Highway Upgrade and Inner Bypass Options has been provided in this working paper. The community generated 'Coastal Ridgeway' option has been reviewed in a separate report (Connell Wagner, 2004a).

Community submissions received since commencement of the Strategy planning process in September 2001 and the Coffs Harbour Community Focus Group meetings were the means through which community members were able to raise concerns relating to the socio-economic impacts of the route options. Categories considered include:

- Community Cohesion
- Amenity Effects
- Access and Movement Patterns
- Land Use and Property (urban and rural)
- Effect on Business Activity
- Tourism.

Although a subset of business activity, tourism was considered as a separate entity due to its importance to the region's economy.

The upgrade of the existing Pacific Highway would involve road widening, removal of traffic lights, local road closures, construction of eight new grade separated interchanges, and a 500m long tunnel through Macauleys Headland. The Inner Corridor Bypass option comprises two indicative routes, an Inner North 1 and 2 and Inner South 1 and 2. These alignments traverse to the west of Coffs Harbour, with Inner South 1 and Inner North 1 lying further east and south respectively and closer to the urban development.

The existing highway upgrade is considered to have high adverse impacts on amenity effects and urban land use and property, due to the number of properties affected, and the loss in amenity through the dominance of the highway and traffic through the city centre. Impacts on community cohesion and business activity are considered to be moderately adverse for the same reasons. The upgrade is likely to have a low adverse impact on local traffic movements through reducing the number of points across which east-west access can be gained. However, through-traffic movement impacts are considered to be moderately beneficial. Low beneficial impacts are anticipated in terms of tourism due to the increased volume of through traffic exposed to the tourist features and facilities.

In terms of land use and property the key adverse impact of the Inner Bypass Corridor is seen to be the effect upon rural activities. The impacts on these are considered to be moderate to high adverse with acquisition of agricultural lands and rural properties anticipated. Inner North 2 and Inner South 2 would have the greatest impact on the urban release areas of North Boambee and West Coffs. Acquisitions along the northern section of Inner North 1 are minimised as the route follows the existing railway easement and along the Inner South 2 due to the tunnel through Roberts Ridge. Community cohesion would be adversely impacted for both the Inner Bypass and the Existing Highway Upgrade, however, the impact would be greater along the existing Pacific Highway due to the higher population concentration.

Amenity of existing residential communities in the vicinity of the bypass and existing highway would be adversely impacted, through noise, air quality and visual impacts. These impacts may be offset to some extent through amenity benefits gained in terms of improved access to and movement in the city

centre. Benefits are also anticipated in terms of urban land use and property through the removal of traffic from the existing highway.

The Inner Bypass is likely to benefit business activity and tourism in a number of areas through the maintenance of access to businesses along the existing Pacific Highway, the potential introduction of business opportunities within the rural community, and the facilitation of access to tourist features and facilities. However, concerns have been expressed by the community regarding the impact of disturbance and intrusion on areas used for eco-tourism and other recreational/wilderness pursuits.

Providing the negative impacts associated with amenity and tourism are appropriately identified and managed, the Inner Bypass would provide greater benefits over the upgrade of the existing Pacific Highway in terms of socio-economic considerations, with fewer adverse impacts on the wider existing community.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy (CHHPS) is being developed with the objective of addressing the need to upgrade the highway between Sapphire and Woolgoolga, while planning for the future traffic needs within the Coffs Harbour urban area. One of the items assessed in the Strategy is the need for reservation of land within the Coffs Harbour LEP to allow for construction of an upgraded highway or bypass, should it be warranted in the future.

A socio-economic assessment of the Highway Upgrade and Inner Bypass Options has been provided in this working paper. Further details of these options are provided in Section 1.3 of this working paper. The community generated 'Coastal Ridgeway' option has been reviewed in a separate report (Connell Wagner, 2004a).

These strategic corridor options have been developed to a level sufficient to establish the feasibility of each in terms of transport function, socio-economic implications and environmental consequences. Regardless of the findings as to which is the most feasible corridor, each option is compatible with all of the route options currently being examined in the northern part of the CHHPS from Moonee to Woolgoolga.

As part of the project development process, a number of studies have been undertaken to determine the performance of each of the corridor options across a range of technical, environmental and social issues. This working paper compiles details of the socio-economic conditions, and issues arising from and outcomes of the community consultation process. The aim is to highlight key socio-economic issues associated with the Highway Upgrade and Inner Bypass Options.

1.2 Study Methodology

Analysis of socio-economic issues associated with major transport infrastructure projects is one mechanism that is utilised to ensure that their impact on people and communities is considered. Such analysis is used to estimate in advance what the social consequences of a specific action could be, and to facilitate the development of mitigation measures for those residual impacts that cannot be avoided.

Social impacts can be defined as the consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the way in which people live, work, play, relate to each other, organise to meet their needs and generally cope as members of society. The term also includes cultural impacts involving changes to the norms, values and beliefs that guide and rationalise people's understanding of themselves in their society.

Social impact assessment can be used as a tool in the project development process to ensure that the following goals are fulfilled in the implementation of projects (Kramer and Williams, 2000):

- *Quality of life:* To promote sustainable, livable communities by placing priority on preserving or enhancing community character, neighbourhood cohesion, social interaction, safety, economic prosperity and general quality of life.
- *Responsiveness:* To promote responsive, community-sensitive decision-making in planning and developing projects that embraces community concerns, seeks to minimise conflict, and works to help solve community problems.
- *Coordination:* To improve coordination among agencies and jurisdictions involved in project development and implementation.
- *Social Justice:* To consider the social equity or distribution of impacts across different populations, with specific focus on the social justice target groups: indigenous groups, people of

non-English speaking backgrounds, low socio-economic status, children and young people, older persons and women.

The following steps were undertaken in the socio-economic assessment of the corridor options:

- Development of a profile of the socio-economic characteristics of the community in the vicinity of the strategic options based on a review of data and literature including census data and Council records.
- Documentation of community attitudes towards the proposed upgrading of the highway based on the results of the stakeholder involvement program undertaken to date. Documentation of these attitudes allows expressed community sentiment and feeling to be incorporated into the analysis of socio-economic issues.
- Analysis of the likely implications of upgrade options on socio-economic characteristics and structure of the study area, including consideration of quantifiable impacts such as property effects and issues which are not so easily quantified such as community cohesion and amenity effects.
- Formation of a Community Focus Group (CFG) in January 2002. Input from the CFG has been through regular meetings. This CFG has met nine times.

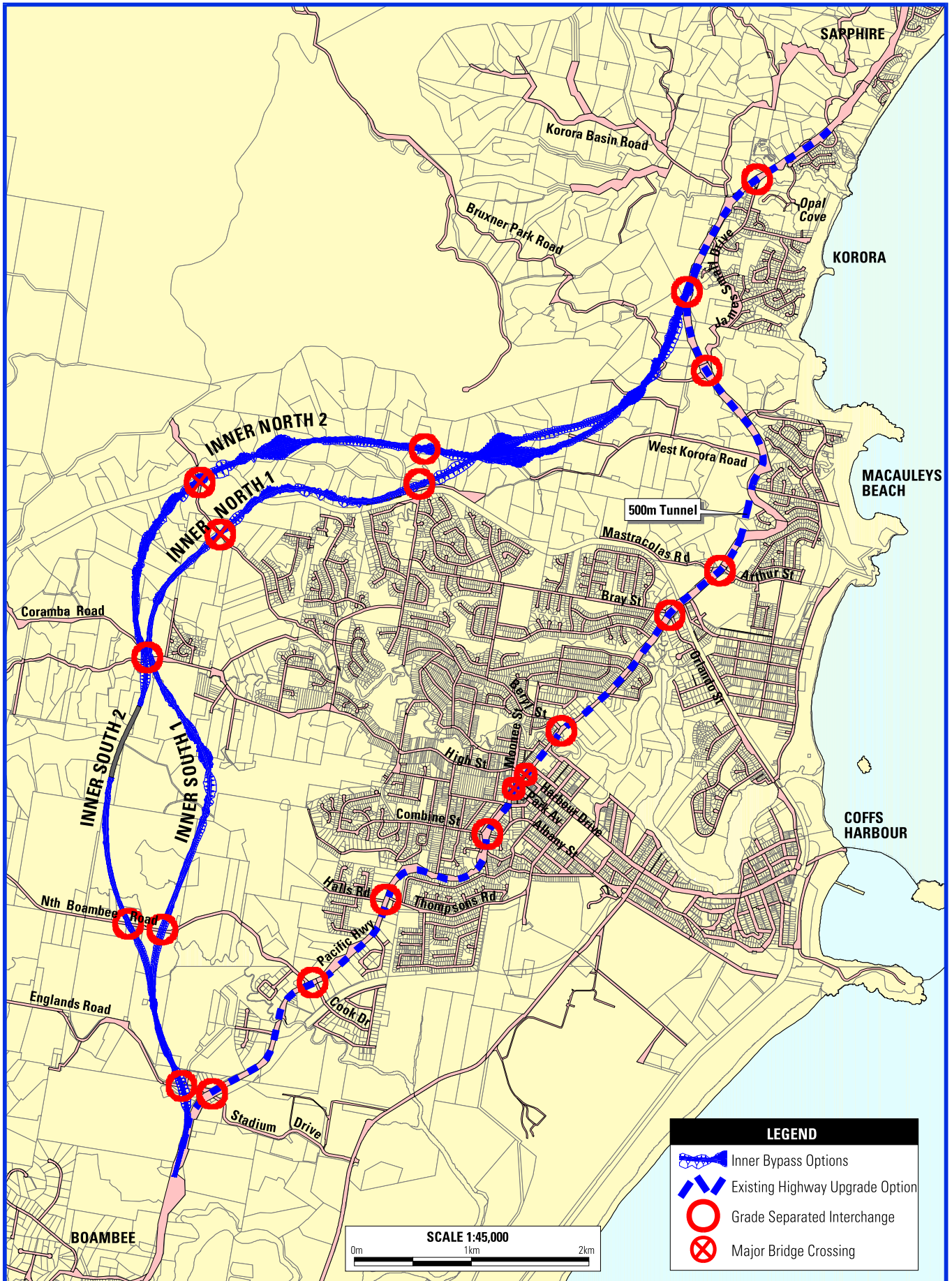
For the purposes of this assessment, the study area is defined as the community in the general vicinity of the corridor options. This included the urban area of Coffs Harbour and residential areas in West Coffs Harbour and to the north at Korora.

1.3 Description of Corridor Options

1.3.1 Inner Bypass

Two indicative route options have been identified in the inner corridor. Each is between 11.0 and 11.6km long with a common 'cross-over point' in the vicinity of Coramba Road, near its intersection with Bennetts Road. The north and south sections of the options are interchangeable and combine to form four variants of the two main alignments. These are illustrated in **Figure 1** and described as follows:

- *Inner South 1:* This option deviates from the existing highway just south of the Englands Road roundabout, aligning to the east of the Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) waste depot and to the west of Isles Industrial Park. It crosses North Boambee Road approximately 300m west of Bishop Druitt College and continues north toward the low saddle in the Roberts Hill ridgeline approximately 100m west of Buchanans Road before proceeding north-west to Coramba Road, crossing near the Bennetts Road intersection.
- *Inner South 2:* This alignment is initially the same as Inner South 1 but deviates from that route south of North Boambee Road and tracks further to the west, to the Roberts Hill ridgeline about 800m west of the other alignment. Because of the higher terrain, this ridge traverse would necessitate a 560m long tunnel (a cutting is not feasible at this location).
- *Inner North 1:* From Coramba Road this alignment veers north-east, crossing Spagnolos Road and Shephards Lane before turning easterly, in close and parallel to the railway line for about 1.6km up to Mackays Road. From this point it deviates from the railway line to pass through another main ridgeline near the western end of Gatelys Road. Further north the alignment skirts the West Korora basin crossing Bruxner Park Road before rejoining the existing highway at Korora Hill.
- *Inner North 2:* This alternative alignment features a more westerly sweep of the West Coffs Harbour basin, providing more separation between the alignment and existing residential areas. It crosses Shephards Lane at its western extremity passing over the railway east of



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FIGURE 1
STUDY AREA SHOWING
GRADE SEPARATED INTERCHANGES

the railway tunnel under Shephards Lane. The route passes through and then behind a major ridgeline near the end of Shephards Lane and traverses a relatively isolated valley that is shielded from the residential areas of West Coffs Harbour. It then passes through the same ridge line as Inner North 1 near the western end of Gatelys Road and from that point the two northern alternatives are the same on the curved approach to the existing highway.

With both of the northern options, short tunnels could be used to eliminate potentially 60m deep cuttings (one on Inner North 1 and two on Inner North 2). Further discussion on tunnelling issues is provided in the *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Strategy Report* (Connell Wagner, 2004c).

1.3.2 Existing Highway Upgrade

The concept for an 'ultimate' upgrade of the existing highway through Coffs Harbour is based on contemporary urban motorway schemes and has been developed to provide a dual-carriageway facility with grade-separated interchanges at key locations for local east-west traffic movements. These would be complemented by the provision of local north-south service roads or adjustments to existing local roads for access to properties and businesses along the existing corridor.

The existing highway upgrade concept is based on schematic design ideas (refer to **Figure 1**). Considerable engineering concept development would be required in the event of it being adopted as the preferred Strategy option. The concept was developed to a form that is sufficient to allow a valid comparison with a possible bypass scenario within the inner corridor.

The main features of the concept as developed to date are as follows:

- A total of 9 grade separated interchanges at
 - Englands Road / Stadium Drive
 - North Boambee Road / Cook Drive
 - Thompsons Road / Halls Road
 - Combine Street / Albany Street
 - north of Coffs Creek near Beryl Street
 - Bray Street / Orlando Street
 - Arthur Street / Mastrocolas Road
 - Bruxner Park Road / James Small Drive south
 - Old Coast Road/James Small Drive north.
- Rationalisation and connection of industrial area access roads on the southern outskirts between Englands Road and Thompsons Road.
- Horizontal alignment improvements (larger radii) and widening between Thompsons Road and Albany Street.
- Lowering of the highway (in an open slot arrangement) through the CBD area between Park Avenue and Coff Street.
- Provision of a service road on the eastern side of the highway over the same length.
- East / west overbridges at Park Avenue / Moonee Street and High Street / Harbour Drive.
- A 500 metre long tunnel through Macauleys Headland, with local traffic remaining on the existing highway.

2. Existing Socio-economic Characteristics

2.1 Community Structure

The Coffs Harbour LGA is located on the mid-north coast of NSW, 510 km north of Sydney and covers an area of 960.9km². The current population of the LGA is 62,906 people (ABS 2001b), with the majority of the population located in urban areas along the coast between Woolgoolga to the north and Sawtell to the south.

The Pacific Highway runs through the LGA, providing a major passenger and freight link between Sydney and Brisbane. Major urban centres include Coffs Harbour, Sawtell and Woolgoolga. Major industries in the LGA include tourism, primary production, manufacturing, government, commercial and retail services. Approximately 50% of the LGA is forested land.

The study area comprises a number of discrete urban settlements, rural residential development and rural/agricultural land.

The key features of the study area include Coffs Harbour and Korora, which are located within the 'Urban District' (CHCC 1999a). This area encompasses the CBD, the central residential area, the Jetty area to the east and the Park Beach, Sapphire and Moonee areas to the north. Significant characteristics of this district are its high population numbers confined predominantly to the coastal plain (CHCC, 2000). Tourism is the most important industry in the City in terms of income and employment generated (CHCC, 1996). This is most noticeable with the high concentration of tourist accommodation in the Park Beach and Korora areas, the restaurant strip in the Jetty area and the City Centre.

As a tourist destination, Coffs Harbour experiences a substantial elevation in population during peak holiday periods. Maximum use of facilities and resources is reached during these periods. It is of note that 46% of tourists to the area are relatives, visitors or friends of local residents. Wholesale and retail businesses in Coffs Harbour are highly dependent on the seasonal tourist trade.

2.2 Demographic Profile

In order to predict what probable social impacts a major highway development may have on a community, the community in question needs to be characterised in the form of a demographic profile. The following section provides a basic demographic profile of the community within the study area and includes data for the entire LGA and, for comparative purposes, the region. Information used in the development of the project has been sourced largely from 1996 Census data provided by CHCC.

2.2.1 Population

Table 2.1 contains a summary of available population data for the Coffs Harbour LGA and detailed population data for the study area.

Table 2.1 Population data within the study area

Locality	1991 population	1996 population	2001 population
Coffs Harbour LGA	51,942	58,337	62,906 ¹
Coffs Harbour Urban	22,141	22,728	23,594
Korora	861	2,367 ²	2,757

1. ABS 2001b

2. Boundary changes in the collection of census data for this area means that the figures are not directly comparable

Source: CHCC 1999a & 1999b

Based on the 1996 ABS estimates, Coffs Harbour has been ranked the 20th fastest growing LGA in the State between 1996 and 1997, with a growth rate of 1.8%. Population growth rates

in the Coffs Harbour LGA were consistently higher than the North Coast average throughout the 1990s (CHCC, 1999b). Projections predict a population of 80,014 by the year 2016 in the Coffs Harbour LGA (CHCC 1999b) and, based on medium level population projections, a population of 93,700 could be reached by 2021 (CHCC, 2000).

2.2.2 Age Profile

The mid-north coast region of NSW is ageing more rapidly than the State as a whole. This reflects its continued popularity as a destination for retirees. The median age in the region was 39 in 1996 up from 36 in 1991 (CHCC, 1999b), with people over the age of 65 making up 18.4% of the population. The greatest population increase in Coffs Harbour between 1986 and 1996 occurred in the 40-49 year age bracket. The population of over 65s has increased by 65% since 1986, compared to a 28.2% increase for the State overall. In terms of the Coffs Harbour LGA, Table 2.2 provides details on the age distribution based on the 1996 census and changes in the distribution since 1986.

Table 2.2 Age Distribution in the Coffs Harbour LGA 1986 to 1996

Age Group (Years)	1986 Population	1996 Population	Coffs Harbour LGA % Change	NSW % Change
0-4	3428	4032	17.6	4.7
5-9	3416	4489	31.4	8.4
10-14	3686	4760	29.1	-2.6
15-19	3273	3994	22.0	-5.1
20-29	5851	6178	5.6	0.9
30-39	6724	8365	24.4	11.9
40-49	4875	8740	79.3	35.5
50-59	4015	5917	47.4	17.2
60-64	2380	2691	13.1	-6.3
65 +	5362	8855	65.1	28.2

Source: CHCC, 1999b

A summary of the age distribution within each of the localities within the study area is as follows (CHCC, 1999b):

- Coffs Harbour Urban area has the highest proportion of 20-29 year olds and relatively large numbers of retirees, particularly those over 80.
- The dominant age groups in the Korora locality are 50-69 year olds. People aged 0-39 years are all under-represented, as are retirees.

2.2.3 Place of Birth and Ethnicity

Information from the 2001 census has been analysed to identify the most common birthplace of residents in the Coffs Harbour LGA. A total of 83% of the population was born in Australia, with the United Kingdom (5%), New Zealand (1%) and India (0.7%) the next most common birthplace. The majority of the population (92%) speaks English at home.

2.2.4 Indigenous Persons

The 2001 census recorded a total of 1,809 people of indigenous descent within the Coffs Harbour LGA, representing 2.9% of the population. This is an increase from the 1996 results, which show the proportion of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to be 2.4%, up from 1.8% in 1991.

2.3 Future Development

Population within the study area is expected to continue growing to 2021 and beyond. The Coffs Harbour Urban Development Strategy (CHCC,1996) predicted that Coffs Harbour is likely to experience a residential land deficiency before 2021. As a result a number of locations were identified for further investigation as urban release areas to accommodate residential housing. Investigation areas within the study area which are currently being reviewed by Coffs Harbour City Council include:

- North Boambee Valley
- West Coffs Urban Investigation Area
- Korora Rural Residential Development Area
- Korora Urban Investigation Area

The anticipated demand for these areas and their current status are discussed in Working Paper No1 Statutory and Strategic Planning Issues (Connell Wagner, 2004b). Areas currently zoned for urban release include, North Boambee and West Coffs urban release areas, shown in **Figure 2**. Both Inner