

Rally review raises questions

By Rudi Maxwell

The independent review of the 2009 World Rally Championship held in the Northern Rivers was tabled in NSW Parliament last Friday, however, questions have been asked about the way in which the review was framed, presented and written.

Mike Cahill, CEO of Integrated Marketing Communications Pty Ltd, prepared the review for the State and Regional Development and Tourism Division of Industry and Investment NSW (formerly the Department of Primary Industries) and the Homebush Motor Racing Authority.

The Repco Rally was held in Kyogle and Tweed Shires in September 2009, amid controversy after the NSW Government introduced special legislation to take the approval process out of the hands of local councils.

Andrea Vickers from the No Rally Group said they were extremely disappointed with the way the IMC report was written and presented.

"The marketing company's job is to please the client and that's what he's done," Ms Vickers said. "What the report is doing is attempting to present the local opposition as marginal and radical and overstating the economic benefits so that if FIA pull out from the event they can shift the blame to the local community and away from



Andrea Vickers from the No Rally Group.

the government.

"It's a real shame because this was a genuine opportunity to restore some of the trust that the local community lost when the WRC act was passed. They have blown that opportunity completely."

The Centre for Tourism, Leisure and Work at Southern Cross University recently published a paper *Event Governance - background to the World Rally Championship, Northern Rivers, NSW*, which paints the event in a very different light to the IMC review.

The SCU paper concluded that "a highly politicised context in which the State

Government's commitment to the economic benefits of the rally to the NSW public sat uneasily against local community values and expectations"; that stakeholders had different expectations of what constitutes consultation and that "clarity around the role of government in various stages of the event planning and management is needed, which would go some way to addressing the emergent issues associated with participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, informed debate and reliable information, accountability and the public interest."

The IMC report concluded that "despite zealous and enduring opposition to the rally by a tiny minority in a community of around 90,000, the Repco Rally 2009 review found there was no other reason for the rally not to be staged in the Northern Rivers region in 2009" and also recommended better consultation with the Githabul Nation Aboriginal Corporation, that "strict environmentally sensitive criteria be formulated to determine the identification of any future rally route" and that environmentally sensitive areas be avoided.

One of the authors of the SCU paper, Associate

Professor Dianne Dredge, has a PhD in Tourism, Planning and Policy, a Masters in Recreation and Leisure Studies, and is a qualified environmental planner. The SCU paper was researched with grant money and passed through the regular academic clearances, including gaining ethical clearance and being peer-reviewed.

Professor Dredge said she felt the IMC report was a "wasted opportunity".

"Overall, I think it lacks a credible evaluation framework that's clearly stated up front. It relies on anecdotal accounts; it is a lost opportunity to redeem credibility," Dr Dredge said. "Community groups would be happy if their concerns were acknowledged as legitimate and responded to.

"In this report they've tried to minimise the concerns and thrown them out without any acknowledgement - that comes through in the type of wording, 'the tiny minority' comes out a lot. The choice of language lends the impression that one side is being favoured."

The two publications also differ on their conclusions about the economic benefits of the rally.

The SCU paper states that "the direct trading profit in real terms may in fact be quite small"; that researcher field notes suggest a "very small crowd and little retail activity in Kyogle and Murwillumbah during event times".

The IMC report includes conclusions from economist Jock Kreitas that "the estimated benefits are probably overstated, particularly the regional ones"; and a remark from the Economic Evaluations Unit of the Innovation Research and Policy Division of the I&I that the "Regional economic impact of \$16.9 million (as claimed by Events NSW) may have been overstated by around \$2.4million" but then concludes that the "Rally generated between \$14million and \$16.9 million" for the Northern Rivers.

"If it is actually true that the rally generated up to \$16.9 million - if this is genuinely the case, why haven't they invested in a rigorous review process?" Dr Dredge said.

"There is so much information here that is not actually transparent. For example, you can't come to a conclusion about how much money was generated without important outgoing costs being analysed and including a methodology so we all know how that's been calculated.

"Another issue is the way particular data is used, it defies logic, saying there are 300 members of the No Rally Group and 7th Generation and putting that into a pie chart of the population, as if that lends credibility. Anyone who watches the Gruen Transfer knows pie charts

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