

Unfinished Business – The Kyeemagh–Chullora Road Inquiry and the future of Sydney

An interview with the Honourable David Kirby, QC, BA, LLB.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16zL7h2jh-g>

The Kyeemagh-Chullora Road Inquiry (1978-81), also known as the Kirby Inquiry, was probably the most thorough planning inquiry ever held in New South Wales.

David Kirby was a 35 year-old junior barrister when he was appointed by Premier Neville Wran to inquire into the Department of Main Roads' proposal for a south-western radial freeway which was planned as an 8-lane surface road through the Wollli Creek Valley, to be built in two 4-lane tranches..

Then, as now, freeways were highly controversial.

Four years before Kirby's appointment the Willis Liberal Government had met bitter public opposition to its plans for an ambitious set of freeways designed to funnel traffic into Sydney's CBD.

Thwarted in its inner city freeway plans, the DMR switched its focus to its thirty-year-old plan for a SW freeway.

The Kirby Inquiry's report was a model of its kind. It recommended against the DMR's preferred option through the Wollli Creek Valley (and another up the Cooks River Valley) on economic, social and environmental grounds. It also recommended a scheme for the railing of a high proportion of containers to and from the newly-established Port Botany.

The Report was well-received by the Wran Government but was shelved after opposition from within the Department of Transport and from the road freight industry. It nevertheless acted as a bulwark against the DMR's plan for the Los Angelisation of Sydney.