SUMMARY:
Reporting on the damage to Armidale Road (MR75) within Armidale Dumaresq Council as a result of the May 2009 floods and the need to develop a strategic approach for the status of the road link between Armidale and Kempsey.

DESCRIPTION:
Whilst considerable damage was caused to the Armidale Road within Kempsey Shire Council during the May floods and the subsequent rainfall event of late June 2009, the extent of damage was more considerable in Armidale Dumaresq Council. Discussions with the Director Engineering and Works at Armidale Dumaresq Council confirm that the estimated cost to repair the damage caused to the road, due predominately to landslips in the order of $5 million, and despite the lodgement of a request for Natural Disaster Declaration for the May flood event this declaration has not been made for the Armidale Dumaresq Council area at the time of writing this report.

It is suggested that Kempsey Shire Council support Armidale Dumaresq Council in its application for Natural Disaster Declaration so that funds will be made available to repair this vital road link between Kempsey and Armidale.

The declassification of this road link under the roads classification review is also of concern as this action will result in considerable additional costs on both Kempsey Shire Council and Armidale Dumaresq Council along with the eventual downgrading of this important social and economic link.

It is suggested that Council work with Armidale Dumaresq Council to jointly lobby the State Government for the reclassification of this road link as a Regional Road and the Federal Government to upgrade this road link to a more suitable standard to support the growing importance of this link between the tablelands and the Macleay Coast region and the developing eco tourism market of the upper Macleay Valley.

The further development of this important economic and social link needs to be underscored by strong strategic planning based on transparent and robust economic data. A copy of the submission made to the Regional
Road Review Panel by Armidale Dumaresq Council concerning the retention of this road link as a Regional Road is attached at Appendix I – Page H12. This submission provides a basis to commence the development of a suitable proposal and long term strategy for the future upgrade of this road, although considerable additional work is required.

It is also considered that the formal naming of this route, whilst symbolic, would enhance the profile of the route and consideration of such a name should be determined as a matter of priority by both councils.

It is suggested that a joint meeting between Kempsey Shire Council and Armidale Dumaresq Council be arranged to prepare a lobbying strategy for the development of this road link to fully support the economic and tourism potential within both the tablelands and the Macleay Valley.

RECOMMENDATION IMPLICATIONS:

- **Environmental**

  An effective joint strategy between Kempsey and Armidale Dumaresq Councils could provide consider improvements to the upper Macleay Valley.

- **Social**

  The social advantage for the residents of the upper Macleay Valley are potentially very considerable.

- **Economic (Financial)**

  The ultimate upgrade of this road link would provide a considerable boost to the economy of both the Macleay Valley and the Tablelands areas.

- **Policy or Statutory**

  Nil

- **Director’s Review**

  The success of this project will involve considerable lobbying based on a well developed strategic plan at both State and Federal Government level.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council support Armidale Dumaresq Council in its application for Natural Disaster Declaration for the May flood event.

2. That Council work in collaboration with Armidale Dumaresq Council to prepare a strategy for the future upgrade of the Kempsey - Armidale Road link and lobby both State and Federal Governments for the upgrade of this critical road link.
3. That Kempsey and Armidale Dumaresq Shire Councils jointly make representation to the NSW Minister for Roads concerning the outcome of the Roads Classification Review and the subsequent declassification of MR75 to a local road between Bellbrook and the intersection with Waterfall Way.

Bruce Morris
DIRECTOR SHIRE SERVICES