



MEDIA RELEASE

Standardisation of Mildura Rail Line Vital

A complete standardisation of the Mildura-Melbourne rail link is vital for the long-term environmental, economic and social future of Victoria according to a report to be released on Friday 3rd October 2008 titled Rail Freight Impact Study - Mildura Derailed.

The Mildura Derailed report suggests a lack of efficient and effective freight rail service to Mildura could cost Victoria in excess of \$100m per annum.

Beyond the economic cost, the report finds that rail transport produces up to 70% less carbon emissions than heavy vehicle freight, which would increase substantially if freight was unable to be carried by rail.

The report also identifies major environmental costs through noise pollution, damage to waterways, road safety concerns on rural highways and major metropolitan roads which are already taking extra heavy vehicle traffic as a result of the line's current state.

Chair of the Alliance of Regional Councils for Rail Freight Development Vernon Knight said that although work the Victorian Government was now doing in a \$73m upgrade to the line was welcome, more needs to be done in the long term.

"The Government has certainly recognised the importance of this rail line and we welcome the upgrade," Councillor Knight said.

"It's time though to recognise the sheer long term benefits that would come on so many fronts from standardising this important line – not only to Mildura's economy but to Victoria's economy and Australia's drive to reduce carbon emissions."

The Mildura region is a major industrial and agricultural area that provides for major domestic and export markets. The region produces 95% of Australia's dried vine fruit, 69% of table grapes, 55% of almonds, a third of all olives, 21% of Australia's citrus and 23% of its wine grape crush.

Mineral sands mining is also growing rapidly in the area and the region has more than a million hectares dedicated to grain growing; producing more than 200,000 metric tonnes of grain annually.

SMEDB Chairman John Irwin said Mildura Derailed provided further proof that a standardised rail line to Mildura was in Australia's national interests.

"Economically, environmentally and socially; the proof is here for all to see," Mr Irwin said.

“With the development of mineral sands mining and the significance of agricultural production in the region, there is really no option other than to standardise the Mildura rail line in the long-term interests of Victoria and Australia.

“The potential is also there for further rail connections to our north, which would make for much more environmentally friendly and efficient freight transport for inland Australia.”

The report indicates that in a worst case scenario, the lack of an efficient freight rail service to Mildura could generate some 91,100 extra heavy vehicle trips.

The report is available from www.milduraregion.com.au.

END OF MEDIA RELEASE

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