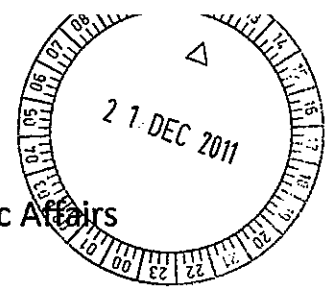


Submission



Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Petition No. 145  
12<sup>th</sup> December, 2011

Bill Cowan - Chairman Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance  
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Representing:

Shires of:

York; Beverley; Quairading; Bruce Rock; Narembeen; Kulin; Kondinin; Lake Grace; Corrigin; Cuballing;  
Wickepin; Dumbleyung; Trayning; Cunderdin; Nungarin; Mukinbudin; Merredin; Mount Marshall;  
Yilgarn; Narrogin Shire; Town of Narrogin, City of Fremantle; Mundaring;  
East Fremantle.

WA Farmers Federation: Seventeen Affiliated Zones State wide.

With support from:

Curtin University Road Accident Research Centre; Wheatbelt South WALGA RoadWise Programme;  
RACWA; Professor Peter Newman; Roadside Conservation Committee;  
Fremantle Road to Rail Group; Australian Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas;  
Wildflower Society of WA; Narrogin Environmental Action Team Inc.

**PUBLIC**

## **Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs**

### **Petition No 145. Closure of Tier 3 Narrow Gauge Rail Lines in the Wheatbelt.**

This issue will have major impact on the Central Wheatbelt, surrounding districts and extending into the city. It is an issue which must be given high priority. The out come will impact on road safety, the environment, the economy, communities and the viability of a section of the grains export industry.

The Strategic Grain Network Committee Report was handed down in 2009.

Finding 12 of the Strategic Grain Network Committee states that “during 2010 rail services will cease to operate on them regardless of actions taken by governments”. We ask does the SGNC have greater powers than those of government? Who is responsible for closure of these lines if not governments?

It is essential that a review of the SGNR takes place to check the accuracy and expose the inaccuracies of this report; it must be accepted that this report omitted to carry out road safety, economic, environmental and social/amenity impact studies; it must also be accepted that substantial changes have taken place since the report was handed to Government.

The ARG costs for freight on Tier 3 lines had increased by up to 118% in four years, no such increases occurred on Tier 1 and Tier 2 lines. These costs must be investigated. Were ARG using/abusing monopoly powers, how can these price rises be justified?

Two years later many of the SGNC findings are irrelevant and the situation is much altered.

Cooperative Bulk Handling has invested \$175m of grower funds into new rolling stock, 22 locomotives and 574 wagons. These new trains with new technology will bring greater efficiencies, reduced fuel consumption, lighter trains with a larger pay load and the potential to bring about far cheaper grain freight outcomes for growers. This has the potential to vastly change (reduce) the cost of rail freight.

The announcement that CBH proposed to invest grower funds into new rolling stock was made after the announcement by Government to follow the recommendations of the SGNC. It is imperative that the Standing Committee give thorough consideration to the CBH proposal to utilise the Tier 3 lines, with their increased capacity to use these lines once the new trains arrive in WA, replacing the ARG fleet which were in some cases close to 40 years old. The CBH and grower commitment to rail, shown by the investment of \$175m in rolling stock is undeniable. This investment is far greater than the \$93.5m stated in the SGNC Report required from the State Government to bring the Tier 3 rail up to standard.

I request that the Standing Committee investigate the road safety impacts. None of the roads in the Tier 3 rail area are engineered to road train specifications. Closure of the Tier 3 rail lines would result in additional truck movements of between 57,000 and 85,500 on roads in Wheatbelt South, in the area which already has the worst road toll in the state of WA.

I request that the Standing Committee investigate the true cost to upgrade the roads to safely carry the grain freight task should the rail close. The \$100m presently proposed is considered to be vastly

inadequate, to provide a safe and efficient path to port for the grain freight task. Many roads which are in dire need of funding and upgrades for the grain freight task have no funds allocated in the SGNC Business Case. The ongoing maintenance costs must also be investigated as Local Governments should not be financially disadvantaged by this state government decision. The Auditor General's report 2009 stated that \$800m was required for repair and maintenance of rural roads.

I request that the Standing Committee investigate an economic impact analysis, the long term affect and costs of the loss of these rail lines, the impact on State transport infrastructure and the loss of a State asset. The Federal Government Carbon Tax was not in place when the SGNR was handed down. The impact of the Carbon Tax must be taken into consideration along with the world oil situation and ongoing fuel price increases. New and efficient locomotives will be in the region of 430% more fuel efficient than road transport.

An environmental impact and an amenity impact study should also be investigated, increased truck movements on rural and city roads, will impact greatly upon communities.

The grain freight task to transport grain from the Kwinana Zone to the Kwinana port is an ongoing task throughout the year; it is not just a harvest time task. As stated in the SGNC Report (page 17 of the Business Case) presently close to 100% of the grain is transported to Kwinana port by rail. The international customers need a steady reliable supply throughout the year. If the rail lines were to close, communities and all road users would be affected for 12 months of the year not only during harvest.

There is overwhelming concern in our communities regarding the proposed closure of tier 3 rail this is shown by the commitment of those groups and Local Governments who are members of the Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance.

**The State Government has a responsibility to provide a safe and reliable path to port for an important part of the grain export industry (46-48% of the state's grain is produced in the Kwinana Port Zone).**

**In short it is imperative that the Standing committee investigate:**

- 1. The true road costs for upgrades to a road train specification for a grain freight path to port and ongoing maintenance costs.**
- 2. The reasons why ARG had spiked prices on Tier 3 rail lines only.**
- 3. The ways to make rail more competitive taking into consideration the CBH investment in to new rolling stock.**
- 4. Have the obligations of Government under the terms of the Lease Agreement with regard to the Tier 3 lines been fully discharged?**
- 5. Impact Analysis Studies for road safety, environmental, economic and amenity.**
- 6. Has the Government honoured its commitments under the terms of the Merredin Transfer Fee agreement?**

I appreciate your time on this matter and I look forward to your response in due course.

Yours sincerely,  
Bill Cowan