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Coonamble Chamber of Commerce – Freight Policy Reform Submission

NSW Freight Policy Reform Program

Dear Dr. Schott,

The Coonamble Chamber wish to share our views under the NSW Freight Policy Reform Program.

Representing the interests of the diverse Coonamble business community, particularly our agricultural sector, we are impacted by the current freight policies and hope this review will provide us with more efficient and reliable freight routes to market.

Coonamble is renowned for its rich and diversified agricultural production, making agriculture the top employer in the region. Broadacre crops dominate the landscape, accounting for nearly 75% of agricultural commodities, complemented by livestock farming, particularly sheep and cattle.

Despite its proximity to the Port of Newcastle, freight is typically delivered along high congestion routes (the Main West Line) to Port Botany and Port Kembla, costing an additional \$461.70 per container each year.

The 220,000 tonnes of freight annually (projected to reach 256,520 tonnes per annum within the next decade), generated within the region, is split evenly between road and rail, with both freight networks requiring infrastructure improvements to facilitate efficient access to the Port of Newcastle.

Coonamble requires the line from Coonamble to Dubbo to be fully upgraded and then well maintained at 25TAL to ensure the modal shift of grain transport from road to rail. A better road network is needed to support rail. Road and rail need to be considered in tandem to ensure each supports the other and that there is integration. Considerations to road safety – road widths and minimum standard of local and regional road surfaces are far more critical issues than light vehicle traffic. These roads need to be able

to accommodate both light and heavy vehicle traffic with a focus on making access to a more flexible rail network at shortest distances possible. The inclusion of more access points to rail throughout the state provides better links to closer ports rather than a limited number of hubs which then feed into Sydney. Increased access to more ports, more intermodal sites, should be a statewide priority.

The completion of the Inland Rail section from Narromine to Narrabri including loading points needs to be well considered in terms of road access by heavy vehicles. To facilitate the benefits from Inland Rail, the development of an Intermodal Terminal at Curban needs to allow for branch line trains to go north (Brisbane/or further into Queensland) or east (to Newcastle) or south (Sydney, Port Kembla, Narromine, Parkes, Melbourne) to give options for primary produce and new commodities by having good access to markets via ports thus encouraging entrepreneurship and economic growth in the region. These could include cast concrete items, specialty manufactured stock & equestrian feeds, chilled meat, waste recycling. To ensure smooth flow of both rail and road traffic there needs to be grade separation (ie over or underpass) where Inland Rail crosses Castlereagh Highway with the current boom gates option being completely unacceptable.

To ensure the best linkages to the closest port to Coonamble the construction of the Maryvale – Gulgong Rail Line at 25 TAL capacity and upgrade of the Ulan – Gulgong line to 25 TAL, will allow for efficient access to the Port of Newcastle via rail.

The lifting of restrictions of PBS2B heavy vehicles on the Castlereagh and Golden Highway Corridor from Coonamble to Newcastle, will enable the freight delivered by road to access a more direct route to the Port. Safer heavy vehicles, and less truck movements will be considered a win for Coonamble farmers as to the wider NSW community.

The incorporation of these recommendations will not only decrease freight transportation costs and boost operational productivity, but also reduce annual CO₂ emissions by 3,080 tonnes, providing benefits to both Coonamble and the wider NSW freight industry.

We are appreciative of the opportunity to provide comment on the Freight Policy Reform Program and look forward to the implementation of these vital changes.

Sincerely,

