



30 May 2024

Dr Schott
NSW Freight Policy Reform Committee

Subject: NSW FREIGHT POLICY REFORM PROGRAM

Dear Dr Schott,

The Gunnedah Chamber would like to contribute to the NSW Freight Policy Reform Program on behalf of local businesses. We acutely understand the exaggerated transport costs currently being borne by our business members due to bureaucracy and historic and antiquated agreements impeding more cost-effective port accessibility.

We are aware of the impact of policy on infrastructure investment, and that our agriculture and coal mining industries, have been negatively impacted by historical prioritisation of Sydney-based ports for import and export.

The Gunnedah district is a thriving regional hub situated in the Northern Inland region on the North-West Plains. References to the region as the Nation's 'food bowl' are appropriately used with the region well renowned for its beef cattle production and broadacre cropping. The coal industry within our region including companies such as Whitehaven & Idemitsu are experiencing significant investment and growth, with mining leases recently extended to 2043 and are of significant local and State value. Gas exploration is expanding which is well poised to address the sad reality of NSW importing the majority of its gas from neighbouring South Australia rather than accessing the resources within its own borders. These activities all rely on port accessibility for import and export of goods.

Current freight consists mainly of grain, meat and coal, with more than 140,000 tonnes of grain transported out of the region annually, contributing over \$120M of value towards Gunnedah's Gross Regional Product. In 2018-19, the export of agricultural products exceeded \$217 M, accounting for 37% of the Shire's total exports. **Currently, the total freight costs from farm to port can reach 30% of the crop value.** This is money that could be saved if we had more efficient freight networks, prioritisation of the Port of Newcastle, and that money would stay in our rural community.

The Port of Newcastle is situated approximately 305 km from the Gunnedah Shire, offering a close option for import and export. Unfortunately, freight is typically routed to Port Botany, increasing costs and emissions, due to historic policy constraints limiting infrastructure investment to the Port.

Direct access to the Port of Newcastle will increase the competitiveness of the export / import industry and subsequently reduce freight costs for local businesses within the Gunnedah Shire and north-west NSW.

The position of the Gunnedah Shire on the existing ARTC track linking Narrabri – Muswellbrook – Newcastle, provides opportunity for investment in the proposed Gunnedah Intermodal Freight Terminal (GIFT). This project involves utilising an existing coal rail loop and constructing a new 400-metre rail siding with a connecting turnout to the main line, allowing continuous travel west to the Inland Rail connection at Narrabri and east to the Port of Newcastle.

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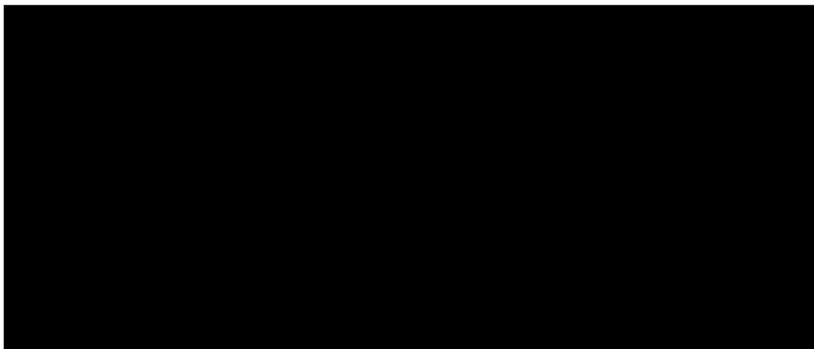
This will deliver cost-effective improvements to the national freight network and enhance safety by shifting freight from road to rail, providing more direct access to the Port of Newcastle.

A variety of infrastructure investments are required to facilitate this transition, with the completion of the proposed intermodal in Gunnedah and the Special Activation Precinct intermodal terminal in Narrabri. This will create significant opportunities for the Gunnedah Shire to access global markets through containerised freight movements. Improving the road infrastructure and redefining the classification of access routes, from Local to State Roads, to the Intermodal Terminal, is essential to facilitate efficient access and enable seamless road and rail synergies.

Implementing these recommendations will greatly enhance the efficiency and sustainability of our operations, offering benefits not only to the Gunnedah businesses but also to the broader freight and logistics industry in New South Wales.

We would urge this reform program to implement changes now that will benefit both current and future residents and businesses of our great region. We are in your hands.

Yours Faithfully,



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