

East-West Crossings of the Illawarra Escarpment – The Sustainment and Resilience of Vital Freight Corridors

Freight movement within south east NSW is not restricted to the radial road/rail networks that exist out of Sydney. There is a consistent freight task that goes east-west out of the ports, major manufacturing hubs and primary production areas within the SEATS region. With seaports at Kembla and Eden, major manufacturing hubs in the Illawarra Shoalhaven, as well as at Bega, Bombala and the Canberra/Queanbeyan areas and major horticultural and timber production areas, processed goods need to be able to be moved to/from the major inland routes being the Hume and Monaro highway corridors. Agricultural produce forms a large proportion of this freight task.

SEATS has long advocated for the sustainment of Mt Ousley Rd and the development of a freight route based on the Nowra to Nerriga section of Main Road 92 which has been built to an HML standard but needs to be extended beyond Nerriga to reach the Hume Highway.

SEATS has consistently supported the provision of an east west freight route from the Princes Highway at Nowra via Nerriga and Tarago to the Hume Highway at Goulburn

Recent weather events have caused land slippages and rock falls on the key mountain passes that cross the Illawarra escarpment between the coast and the tablelands causing several of these routes to be closed for prolonged periods for major reconstruction works. East Coast Lows (ECL) are intense **low** pressure systems which occur, on average, several times each year off the eastern **coast** of Australia, in particular southern Queensland, NSW and eastern Victoria.

The influence of the East Coast Lows can be seen in the table below when in 2022 the annual rainfall totals were 100% (double) the annual long term average for each of Sydney, Albion Park and Nowra.

These events caused medium/long term interruptions on several of the mountain passes, specifically Mt Ousley, Macquarie Pass, Jamberoo Pass and Moss Vale Road through Kangaroo Valley. The South Coast Rail line and the Moss Vale to Unanderra Rail Line were also affected and were unavailable to trains for periods.

Many of these routes are regular haulage routes for freight moving up or down the escarpment. They are also commuter routes for workers and tradesmen going about their regular work on both the coast and tablelands.

Supply chain effects were experienced by industry within the region as well as for customers/suppliers outside the region, including meeting shipping timetables.

This scenario is not a recent event. In the 1980s a large section of the South Coast Rail Line was washed away in a storm in the northern suburbs of Wollongong. The repairs took weeks/months having a major disruption to freight and commuter services.

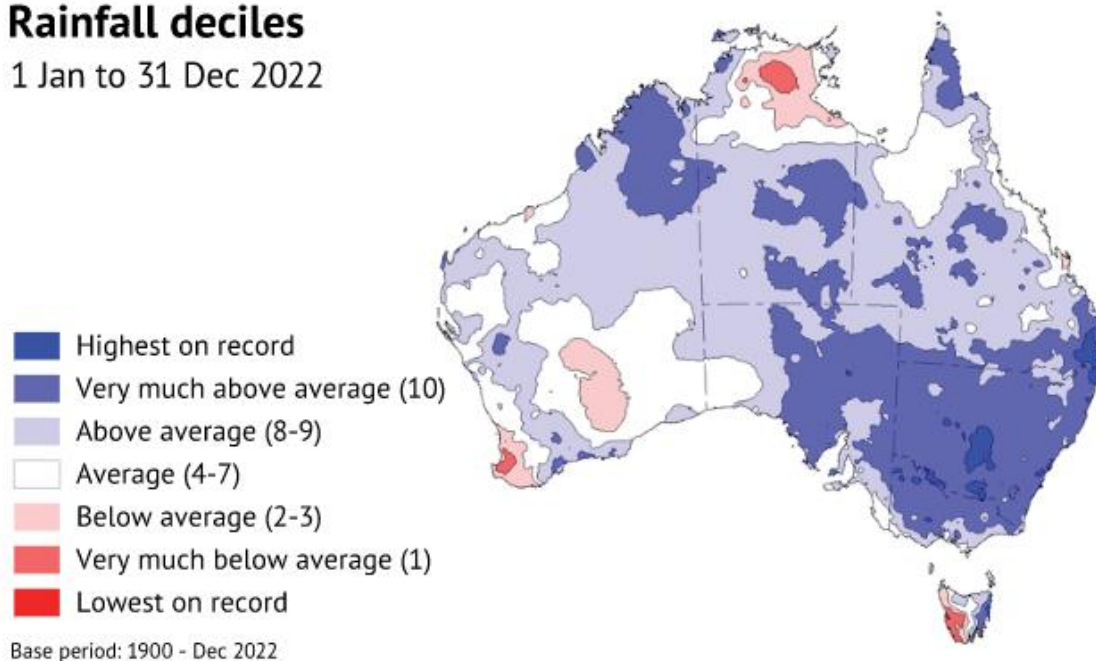
SEATS shares with industry the concern that the reliability and sustainment of the key east-west escarpment freight crossings needs to be prioritised by the NSW

Government in its maintenance and upgrade programs. The business and reputation of regional processors can be influenced by prolonged supply chain disruptions.

Annual Rainfall in mm								
Airports	Mean Rainfall	Mean Days >1mm	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Sydney	1093.4	96.1	871.4	831.4	749.4	1225.4	1198.4	2274.8
Camden	823.2	49.7	911.8	528.5	393.6	1026.6	1022.5	1704.4
Albion Park	998.1	82.6	971.8	637.2	596.0	1266.6	1138.8	2585.4
Moss Vale AWS	958.4	93.0	714.4	612.3	446.8	1247.2	1113.4	1857.8
Goulburn	575.2	69.6	488.0	388.6	350.4	763.0	943.8	1028.4
Nowra	1133.1	65.8	814.0	751.2	577.4	1673.2	1280.0	2535.4
Canberra	615.4	72.0	486.0	472.0	358.6	790.0	912.6	892.4
Moruya	852.6	78.5	843.2	724.6	492.4	1253.0	1189.4	1379.2
Cooma	539.5	69.3	563.4	342.8	318.6	572.8	847.4	648.6
Merimbula	783.8	72.7	564.4	491.8	425.0	1019.0	1325.4	1072.8
Bombala AWS	650.9	81.4	592.8	494.6	385.6	655.4	1011.0	1025.4
Mallacoota	939.8	92.4	801.8	758.6	595.2	1002.8	1264.6	1133.0

Rainfall deciles

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2022



Source: Bureau of Meteorology

Summary

Clearly Mt Ousley/Picton Rd is the most important escarpment crossing, BUT what is the fallback position within NSW to accommodate HML/PBS vehicles and share the load for freight up/down the 800m mountain range.

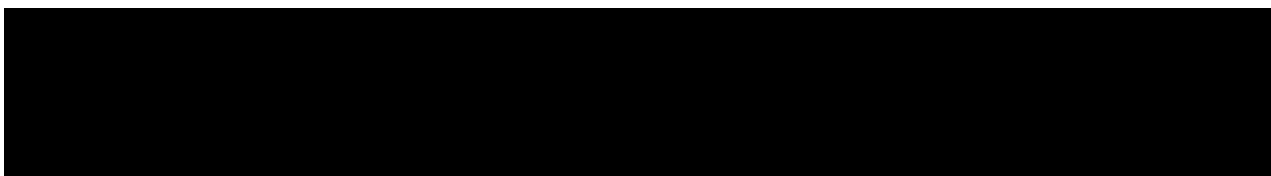
A second crossing, at least, needs to be identified and ready to perform this task. This selection needs to be cognisant of the type and importance of the freight on the SEATS - East-West Crossings of the Illawarra Escarpment – The Sustainment and Resilience of Vital Freight Corridors – February 2023

national/state/regional/local need and the detour distances to satisfy the freight tasks involved.

SEATS Recommendation

That SEATS

- a) Strongly supports the upgrading of the Mt Ousley/Picton Rd corridor, including the works near the University of Wollongong
- b) Requests that Transport for NSW undertake a “what if” investigation on the provision of road and rail links across the Illawarra Escarpment with the view to identifying and supporting a second east-west road freight route which can satisfy future freight requirements in most natural disasters.
- c) Requests that it be part of any steering committee formed by TNSW
- d) Indicate that some funds may be available to support such an investigation.



Greg Pullen, Executive Officer, SEATS.

February 2023