

Media Release



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BUMPER GRAIN HARVEST REQUIRES RESTORATION OF VITAL RAIL LINK

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Restoring a short section of unused track in regional Victoria would help shift by rail an expected bumper winter grain harvest and avoid the need for hundreds of truck journeys. The project would create badly needed jobs and could be completed in a few months. Advocacy group Rail Futures Institute is urging the Victorian Government to fast-track the repair and restoration of the 41-kilometre track section between Inglewood and Eaglehawk in time for the harvesting and export of winter crops later this year.

This relatively small but strategic project in north-west Victoria would allow broad gauge grain trains on the Sea Lake and Manangatang lines (the Korong Vale group) a second route to Melbourne or Geelong via Inglewood, Eaglehawk and Bendigo, adding to the Victorian rail network's capacity to deliver crops to ports for export. Trains on these lines have been restricted to a single route via Dunolly, Maryborough and Ballarat since the Inglewood-Eaglehawk line was put out of action owing to flood damage.

But with the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences forecasting winter crop production in Victoria this year to reach a near-record 7.4 million tonnes – 16% above the 10-year average to 2018-19 and nearly double last year's production – Rail Futures Institute is anticipating that limited capacity of the rail network between Dunolly and Ballarat may force some of the grain harvest to be trucked to port unless a second rail route can be made available.

“In offering a second option for Korong Vale group grain trains to go south, the number of broad gauge trains proceeding via Dunolly and Maryborough can be reduced, releasing more train paths for standard gauge trains from the Mildura and Murrayville lines which can only reach Geelong, Portland or Melbourne via Ararat and so must travel through Maryborough,” Rail Futures President John Hearsch said.

Mr Hearsch said the work mainly involved replacement of sleepers, repairs to damage from floods in 2007 and 2011 and reactivation of the rail junctions at Inglewood and Eaglehawk. New sleepers, ballast and other materials needed to complete the restoration can mostly be sourced locally.

Once reinstated, future options could include the development of new freight facilities on the corridor and potential extension of some V/Line Bendigo passenger services beyond Eaglehawk to Marong. It will also restore a direct link between Bendigo's important rolling stock manufacturing and repair industry and a significant part of the rail network in north-western Victoria.

“We are urging a fast allocation of funding so that these labour-intensive works can be actioned between July and October of this year so that this important freight link can again be made available to handle the forecast bumper grain harvest from November 2020,” Mr Hearsch concluded. For more information, <https://www.railfutures.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/INGLEWOOD-EAGLEHAWK-REVIVAL-FACT-SHEET.final -7.pdf>

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