

Legislative Council
Standing Committee on Development
Attention: Mr Bayne McKissock
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13 January 2004

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Dear Mr McKissock,

RE: INQUIRY INTO PORT INFRASTRUCTURE

The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board (NRRDB) has prepared this submission as the Board is the peak economic regional body in the Northern Rivers region of NSW and is instrumental in encouraging development in the region through investment projects and facilitating the development of a number of new industries. The Board considers that any future planning and development of port infrastructure must ensure development and maintenance of facilities and supporting infrastructure on a whole of State (i.e. NSW) basis.

Freight Movement

DOTARS (2002)¹ identifies that total domestic freight movement has an annual average growth rate of 2.8%. Road transport is the dominant mode over relatively short distances and where alternatives are not available, but a significant share (28%) of tonne kilometres (i.e. the no. of tonnes moved multiplied by distance travelled) of dry and liquid bulk commodities is moved by sea over very long distances. A large proportion of rail freight involves intrastate bulk commodity movements from the location of extraction or production to the seaport of processing location. The port infrastructure inquiry needs to recognise these movement patterns and ensure a holistic approach towards regional planning and the provision of infrastructure to support access to key ports in NSW.

Regional Planning

The Development Board recognises the importance of a strategic approach to plan for port growth due to the significant investment levels and long lead times required for the development of port facilities and infrastructure. The primary focus of the NSW Ports Growth Plan is currently on the development of port capacity in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. Whilst these ports are currently the major ports in NSW, it is important that any plan provides a strategic framework for all of regional NSW in terms of:

- the development and/or maintenance of existing port infrastructure;
- identification of the role of existing regional ports (eg Coffs Harbour, Yamba) and their contribution to future economic development and growth in regional NSW;
- the maintenance, establishment or upgrading of access routes and networks to ports in regional NSW;

¹ Auslink: Towards the National Land Transport Plan Green Paper

- a focus on holistic freight transport movement that is structured along intermodal lines with a logistics chain approach and the identification of strategic corridors; and
- the development of a framework for investment to enhance the efficiency and productivity of freight logistics through regional transport, port and intermodal terminal facility development and infrastructure.

The Ports Growth Plan introduces certainty for future port development in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong but does not identify opportunities and benefits for other parts of regional NSW. The emphasis in other parts of NSW may be more appropriately placed on enhancing regional connectivity, particularly in terms of freight transfer to the ports and the infrastructure required to support freight movement and accessibility.

Northern Rivers Infrastructure

The Northern Rivers region is well serviced by transport infrastructure for freight movement and has a recently improved and upgraded infrastructure network which has provided a significant boost to the level of accessibility. Most produce is transported to domestic markets by road and the region is well positioned in terms of proximity to major markets in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane. In terms of export facilities the ports of Brisbane, Yamba and Newcastle service the area and the new freeway connection to the north has enhanced access to the Port of Brisbane. Brisbane provides Northern NSW and Queensland with direct access to international shipping lanes and a link to the markets of South East Asia and is serviced by a standard gauge railway. Rail infrastructure consists of an inland standard gauge line to the Port of Brisbane, with a spur line to Murwillumbah (that could be connected to the narrow gauge line linking Robina to Brisbane), and there is a proposal for an inland freight facility at Casino and / or Grafton. Air transport services link many of the centres within Northern NSW to Sydney, Brisbane, and Newcastle.

Key directions to consider for future infrastructure development include continuing to improve access times to the Port of Brisbane and Brisbane Airport and enhanced rail freight to expand the potential national and international market reach for the Northern Rivers region's producers. The proposal for an interchange and bulk breaking facility at Casino and, or Grafton should be supported, particularly now that the standard gauge extends directly to the Port of Brisbane. Such an interchange would also add depth and diversity to the regional employment base and expand the depth of freight forwarding and transport services firms which are critical to value chain improvements.

Regional Rail Infrastructure Needs

The Development Board is supportive of the proposal for the Minister of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources to examine how to increase the proportion of containers moved by rail to and from the ports to intermodal terminals particularly in regional NSW. This is a key mechanism to encourage the development of regions and to invest in the provision of supporting infrastructure. The Auslink Green Paper (DOTARS, 2002) highlights the potential for port access to increase the use of rail, and this approach is also recommended in the NSW Ports Growth Plan. Historically, there was a rail service running from Brisbane to Coolangatta, but when the services were terminated in the 1960s the rail line was pulled up. The Queensland Government is now in the position of having to resume large tracts of land and redevelop previously available infrastructure. Medium-term plans are in

place for upgrade and augmentation of the Gold Coast line that currently runs from Beenleigh to Robina. The line is at capacity and will be duplicated and extended to Tugun, and then to the Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta. Once this work is complete on the extension of the Queensland system to Coolangatta, there will remain a gap of only approximately 20 kilometres between the termination of the Casino-Murwillumbah line at Condong and the Gold Coast Airport. This further investment would represent a relatively small project in comparison to other transport options and improve the range of options for freight movement to the Port of Brisbane.

Regional priorities include:

1. setting aside of a land corridor for rail to pass from Condong to Coolangatta (Condong is the place where the Casino-Murwillumbah line currently terminates and the Murwillumbah-Condong section of this line is believed to be currently unused); and
2. medium-term planning for connection of the line from Condong to Coolangatta, which would incorporate feasibility studies, business planning and environmental impact statements.

The identification and planning for such a strategic rail infrastructure corridor provides a holistic and long term consideration about port infrastructure requirements and development on a national basis and recognises regional development needs and requirements for the Northern Rivers. It is important Government initiates planning now to ensure timely delivery of new capacity and to encourage industry to plan for structural adjustments.

Conclusion

The Development Board appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Port Infrastructure Inquiry and believes that a strategic overview across the State, recognising cross-border linkages and the development of support infrastructure such as intermodal terminals and access road and rail routes is critical to identify investment potential and requirements.

Yours sincerely,



Katrina Luckie
Executive Director.