



PO Box 168, OUYEN VIC 3490

Thursday 9th April 2026

Hon. Joe Szakacs MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
GPO Box 1533
Adelaide SA 5001
Minister.Szakacs@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister Szakacs,

Re: Northwest Victoria and South Australia Rail Link (NW Vic & SA Rail Link)

First, congratulations on your recent ministerial appointment to Infrastructure and Transport.

Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC) is the nation's highest earning agricultural Local Government Area (LGA), according to the last ABS Agricultural Census in 2021. Together with the broader Sunraysia region, it is forecast to produce more than 12.8 million tonnes of intermodal (shipping container) freight over the ten years to 2035, including fruit, wine, grain, hay and almonds.

Given the region's distance from ports, rail should be well positioned to meet this task. However, more than 80% of the intermodal freight will continue to be transported by road, including to Adelaide, requiring approximately 6 billion net tonne truck kilometres over the forecast period.

In addition, the share of export bulk grain transported from the MRCC LGA by rail is at an 'all time low' since the transition to bulk handling in the 1940s–50s. It is estimated that the volume of bulk grain exports transported on road from the MRCC LGA is nearing 80% and again including Adelaide.

Our region's lack of efficient rail connectivity to port continues to suppress investment in rail related infrastructure and stifle value-adding opportunities, costing the Mildura Council area and Sunraysia region hundreds of thousands of dollars each week. These losses are borne directly at the farm gate, where it is well documented that "paddock to port" costs, particularly for grain and fruit, are uncompetitive by international standards, a position that has been exacerbated by recent fuel price increases.

Ouyen Inc. is an apolitical, not for profit economic and social development organisation and is the lead agency in northwest Victoria advocating for the urgent reinstatement of the NW Vic & SA Rail Link

Now, more than ever, Ouyen Inc. and the primary producers, exporters, and mineral sands & rare earth miners across southwest NSW and northwest Victoria, require the option to efficiently rail large volumes of freight to the port of best fit, whether in Victoria or South Australia. Train access to alternate ports, both for everyday operations and contingency scenarios, will strengthen overall rail network productivity, unlock economic opportunities, support export competitiveness, and help meet ESG expectations.

At present, these aspirations are constrained by the lack of rail connectivity between northwest Victoria and South Australia. The key elements of this disconnect include:

- Taillem Bend – Pinnaroo (145 km): Converted to standard gauge in 1998 but closed in 2015.
- Pinnaroo to Murrayville (~26 km): A broad-gauge line that became isolated and closed in 1998.
- Murrayville - Ouyen (109 km): The \$40+ million reopening and conversion to standard gauge, has since 2022, only carried three trains in the past three years, largely due to the two issues above.

Please refer to [Appendix A Northwest Victoria and SA Rail Link: Problem definition, solution, benefits & cost estimate](#). The extensive list of benefits includes those mentioned above and others that are of national importance, notably, providing a contingent Melbourne – Adelaide/Perth route via Ouyen, during track closures between Ararat and Taillem Bend caused by natural disasters, rail incidents and maintenance.

Please also refer to [Appendix B: Sunraysia Mallee Port Link](#). Ouyen Inc. is facilitating this intermodal project located 11 km south of Ouyen. Its strategic location, vetted by GHD Advisory, will enable trains to both Melbourne and Adelaide with the goal of achieving 24 hour train cycles to both ports. This together with a large, diversified freight catchment will ensure year round full train loads, will improve rail productivity and reduce overall transport costs. Backed by strong support from agricultural and rail industry groups, local road transport operations, local members of Parliament and the broader community, this shovel ready project will significantly fill the gap in the intermodal market outlined in the opening paragraphs of this letter

The nations peak rail industry groups, Australasian Railway Association (ARA) and the Freight on Rail Group (FORG), have endorsed the Sunraysia Mallee Port Link and reinstating ~25km of track between Murrayville and Pinnaroo with standard-gauge rail infrastructure, as Critical Infrastructure Gap Projects for Victoria










Ouyen Inc.'s advocacy for the NW Vic & SA Rail Link proposal to date, includes:

- Two positive meetings with the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning, emphasising the need to remove any parochial, state-based barriers and instead focus on improving productivity for farmers, exporters and miners, while delivering broad economic and ESG benefits.
- Meetings with the Victorian and SA cross border commissioners
- Receiving a written response on the subject from the Hon Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Freight and Ports (Refer to Appendix C) advising the need for a business case.
- Reaching out to Flinders Port Holdings in January last year followed by extensive information exchange and a joint meeting with the SA Freight Council. We have also shared information with Aurizon and the South Australian Department of Infrastructure and Transport.
- Extensive engagement with key stakeholders across northwest Victoria and southwest NSW

Representatives from Ouyen Inc., agricultural industry groups, road transport operators, and (potentially) mining sector representatives, request an opportunity to meet with you within the next four weeks to discuss reopening the NW Vic & SA Rail Link and raise a matter regarding the current lease of the Taillem Bend to Pinnaroo line.

Thank you for considering the above. Should you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact us at ouyenincsecretary@ouyen.vic.au or contact me directly on [REDACTED], or our consultant Michael P. O'Callaghan on [REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely,

Jason Wills	Co-Chair	Ouyen Inc	 OUYEN Inc.
Brett Hosking	President	Victorian Farmers Federation	 Victorian Farmers Federation
Nathan Hancock	Chief Executive Officer	Citrus Australia	 Citrus Australia
Tim Jackson	Chief Executive Officer	Almond Board of Australia	 australian almonds ALMOND BOARD OF AUSTRALIA
Jeff Scott	Chief Executive Officer	Australian Table Grape Association	 ATGA Australian Table Grape Association Inc.
Steve Burt	Chair	Mallee Sustainable Farming	 MALLEE SUSTAINABLE FARMING
Vince Cordoma	Managing Director	LRT / VCT Refrigerated Transport	 LRT / VCT REFRIGERATED TRANSPORT
Angelo Lamattina	Director	Rocky Lamattina & Sons	 Rocky Lamattina & Sons Pty Ltd
Rocky Gifrelle	Managing Director	Gifrelle Refrigerated Transport	 GIFFELLE Refrigerated TRANSPORT

Cc

The Hon. Tom Koutsantonis MP, Treasurer of South Australia, Minister for Energy and Mining

The Hon. Chris Picton MP, Minister for State Development

The Hon. Melissa Horne, Minister for Ports and Freight and Minister for Roads and Road Safety

Ms Jade Benham MP, Member for Mildura, The Nationals Whip in the Legislative Assembly

Dr. Anne Webster MP, Member for Mallee, Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government

The Hon. Catherine King MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Mr. Mike Wilde, A/Director, Transport Strategy and Network Planning, Department of Infrastructure and Transport

Mr. Chris Wood, Executive Director, Invest SA, Department of State Development,

dsd.investmentsupport@sa.gov.au

Mr. Jonathan Wilson, Chief Executive Officer, SA Freight Council

Mr. Brett Hosking, President, Victorian Farmers Federation

Cr. Ali Cupper, Mildura Rural City Council, Mayor, Infrastructure and Assets Portfolio

Cr. Rebecca Crossling, Mildura Rural City Council, Economic Development Portfolio

Cr. Ian Arney, Mildura Rural City Council, Agriculture Portfolio

Cr. Daniel Linklater, Mayor, Wentworth Shire

Cr. Peter Crisp, Deputy Mayor, Wentworth Shire

Ms. Roz Chivers, Acting General Manager Rail Freight & Heavy Haul, Australasian Railway Association

Mr. John Hearch, President, Rail Futures Institute

Mr. Nick Codling, General Manager Commercial, National Intermodal Company

Ms. Leonie Burrows, Chair, Australia Regional Development – Loddon Mallee

Mr. Brett Millington, Director, Australia Regional Development – Loddon Mallee

Mr. Stewart Lammin, Chief Executive Officer, Flinders Port Holdings,

Mr. Tim Clifton, Manager Growth, Aurizon

Mr. Brad Weston, Commercial Manager, Aurizon

Ms. Sascha Detmold Cox, Chair, South Australian Business Chamber

Mr. Justin Jamieson, Deputy Chair, South Australian Business Chamber

Ms. Sally Curtain, Chief Executive, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr. John Gladigau, Chair, Grain Producers, SA

Mr. James Sorahan, Executive Director – Mineral Council Australia – Victoria, Director, Australia Regional Development – Loddon Mallee

Mr. Mark Williams, former railway engineer, planner and economist, SA Government

Mr. John Hill, Chair, South Australian Transport Action group Inc

Mr. Bernie Hyde, Executive General Manager, Operations Readiness, VHM Ltd

Mr. Brad Henderson, Principal Advisor - Resource Development, Iluka Resources Ltd

Ms Kelly-Anne Saffin, South Australia Cross Border Commissioner

Mr. Brett Davis, Victorian Cross Border Commissioner

Appendix A. Northwest Victoria and SA Rail Link: Problem definition, solution, benefits & cost estimate

Problem

The closed rail connection between Murrayville (Vic) and Tailem Bend (SA) is limiting the opportunities to improve supply chain productivity, improve resilience and act on environment, social and governance (ESG) requirements.

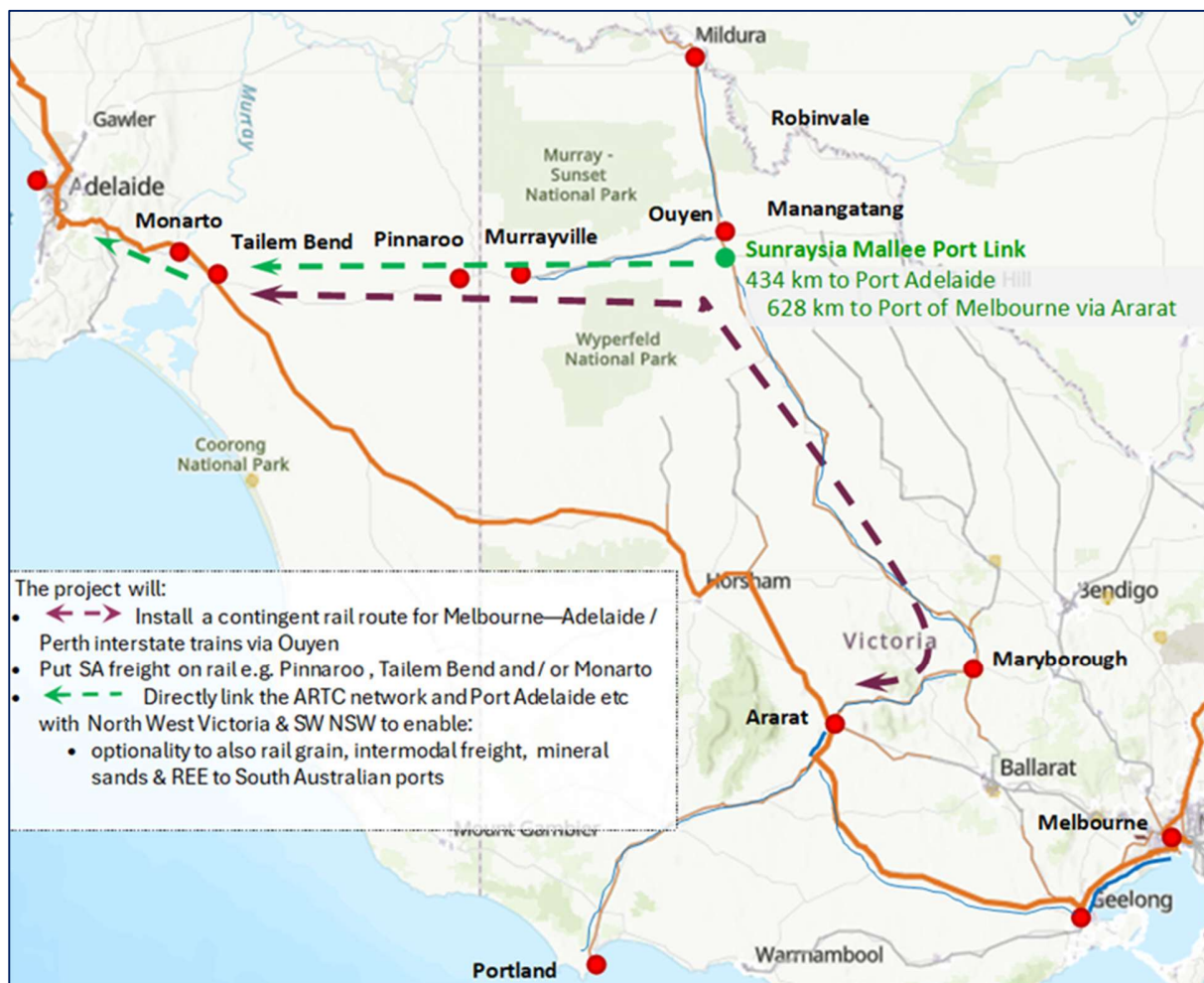
Not having the option to efficiently rail large volumes to the port of 'best fit' is hampering productivity and emission reduction opportunities for agriculture, mineral sands & rare earths located in southwest NSW, northwest Victoria and eastern SA. The balance of exports between Victoria and South Australia etc. should be determined by supply chains that deliver both efficiency and responsiveness to user needs.

Without this cross border rail connection, the resilience and reliability of the current rail and port supply chains will continue to be disrupted by the increased incidence of natural disasters (fires, floods etc.), accidents and disputes as well as ongoing rail maintenance shutdowns. Without network redundancy, rail transport becomes unreliable, leading to an over reliance on road transport in Victoria and South Australia

Solution

Re-open the existing cross-border rail from Murrayville to Tailem Bend and build the 'shovel ready' Sunraysia Mallee Port Link intermodal terminal while exploring other potential terminals at Tailem Bend etc. This will boost productivity, resilience, economic and ESG opportunities for SA and Victoria by enabling:

- a contingent freight rail route for: Melbourne—Adelaide/Perth interstate trains (via Ouyen)
- rail services from the large export production regions along the Pinnaroo line
- direct rail access to alternate ports in SA from northwest Victoria where more than 80% of intermodal freight and export grain goes on road to port. It will incentivise mining of mineral sands and rare earths
- utilisation of the 109 km reopened and gauge converted Ouyen to Murrayville rail line
- synchronisation of efficient rail with best use of road transport and a reduction in overall trucks volumes including Melbourne inner and western suburbs and S.E. Adelaide ascending from the hills.



Appendix A. NW Vic and SA Rail Link: Problem definition, solution, benefits & cost estimate - Continued

Benefits

	Vic.	S.A.	Fed.
<p>Benefits: Improve efficiency and supply chain productivity <i>'...agricultural products, mineral sands or rare earths that are located in either NSW or Victoria could be freight-advantaged through South Australia. Any planning for freight corridors should be made agnostic and consider where rail may be best suited for the freight task'</i> Source: South Australia's 20-Year State Infrastructure Strategy 2025 page 62</p>			
<p>Rail: re-open the existing cross-border rail from Murrayville to Tailem Bend to improve supply chain productivity and allow access to the port of 'best fit' This project will encourage mode shift to rail, by allowing market forces and user optionality, to determine the 'best fit' port by rail to also include Adelaide and potentially Darwin etc. This will increase port competition, reduce the already high paddock to port costs, incentivise freight on rail, including Pinnaroo and incentivise mining of HMS & REE while lowering transport emissions</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>Intermodal: Build the 'shovel ready' Sunraysia Mallee Port Link (SMPL) to help fill the 800,000+ tonnes p.a. gap in the intermodal rail freight market in NW Victoria The SMPL immediate freight catchment area has more than 0.88 million tonnes of intermodal freight p.a. on road to ports (and increasing to 1.15 million tonnes by 2035) SMPL is strategically located at the base of a large, diversified freight catchment region with rail access to Melbourne and potentially obtain 24 hour train cycle times to Port Adelaide, significantly improving rail efficiency and supply chain productivity</p>	✓		
<p>Rail: increase utilisation of the 109 km refurbished and gauge converted Ouyen to Murrayville rail line by more than 100% Capitalise on the significant 2018 -2022 Victorian and Federal Governments investment on this standard gauge rail line that has since had 3 freight trains</p>	✓		✓
<p>Port: improve Flinders Adelaide Container Terminal (FACT) dock side rail throughput by approx 15% Sunraysia Mallee Port Link and reopened rail line between Murrayville and Tailem Bend has the potential to increase intermodal freight <u>on rail</u> to the FACT by approx. 15%. Further increases in throughput could be achieved with potential intermodals at Tailem Bend and / or Murray Bridge</p>		✓	
<p>Benefits: Improve resilience The increased incidence of fires, floods, and other natural disasters as well as sudden unplanned disruptions such as accidents and disputes, pose significant risks to supply chains between Melbourne, Adelaide / S.A. and Perth as well as NW Victoria and Victorian Ports. This project will enhance supply chain and drought resilience by providing access to alternative supply routes and ports.</p>			
<p>Rail: open a significant contingent rail route for Melbourne – Adelaide / Perth freight trains This project will provide an alternate supply rail route (via Ouyen) when the circa 430 km section of standard gauge line from Ararat Vic to Tailem Bend SA is out of service (refer to map on page 1) This will improve supply chain resilience for Adelaide & South Australia</p>		✓	✓
<p>Port: enable permanent and contingent rail access to alternate ports in SA This project will enable direct rail access from Sunraysia, Mildura Rural City Council LGA and neighbouring regions to alternate container ports, in particular Flinders Adelaide Container Terminal, greatly improving the regions productivity, international competitiveness and supply chain resilience.</p>	✓	✓	
<p>Drought: lift 'Ag' resilience by enabling more grain & fodder on rail between states During times of drought, the usually higher cost of grain and fodder is met with the very expensive cost of transporting it over long distances. This project will provide a direct rail connection between NW Victoria, SA and the transcontinental rail line, which will assist with future drought proofing measures.</p>			✓

Appendix A. NW Vic and SA Rail Link: Problem definition, solution, benefits & cost estimate - Continued

Benefits - continued

	Vic.	S.A.	Fed.
<p>Benefits: Act on environment, social and governance requirements Ensuring freight movements' impacts on community safety and environmental outcomes are balanced with our need to ensure freight moves efficiently. This will help to maintain liveability of our cities and economic prosperity (Aug 2025 National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy)</p>			
<p>Rail: Improve overall road safety and social amenity by reducing the reliance on trucks, including the Melbourne inner western suburbs and where the South Eastern Freeway descends into Adelaide. Reopening the cross-border rail from Murrayville to Tailem Bend, putting grain back onto rail including Pinnaroo, building Sunraysia Mallee Port Link and other opportunities will reduce freight on roads including the South Eastern Freeway</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>Intermodal: Building new intermodals such as the shovel ready Sunraysia Mallee Port Link (SMPL) and those proposed for Tailem Bend and / or Murray Bridge will cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve road safety. The project is supported by farmers, exporters, freight accumulators, road transport operators, peak rail industry groups and community</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>Rail: Provide practical & effective infrastructure to achieve climate goals 'Transporting more freight via rail represents one of the most effective means of achieving the Australian Government's legislated emissions reduction target of 43% by 2030' Source: The Future of Freight October 2023 - Rail Freight Productivity Review</p>			✓

Cost estimates

Components	Costing source	\$ million
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reopen 170 kilometres of existing rail line between Murrayville, Vic. to Tailem Bend, S.A. (including ~ 25 kilometres of gauge conversion) 	<i>Estimate</i>	210
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct the 'shovel ready' Sunraysia Mallee Port Link road rail intermodal terminal, located 11 kilometres south of Ouyen Victoria, at the base of a very large, diversified freight catchment region where 82% of the 1 million + tonnes p.a. of intermodal freight currently goes on road. 	<i>GHD Advisory detailed business case 2021+ CPI</i>	52
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct a rail turning lane on the South West side of Ouyen to link train movements to and from south of Ouyen with the Ouyen to Tailem Bend rail corridor to the west 	<i>Estimate</i>	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency 	<i>Estimate</i>	27
Estimated total cost*		\$ 294
*Could be higher if scope of remediation works included a track standard for contingent rail route for Melbourne – Adelaide/Perth interstate trains		

Appendix B. Sunraysia Mallee Port Link (SMPL)

<p>Background:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rail distances from Ouyen (as a proxy for NW Vic) is 424 km to Port Adelaide and 638km to the Port of Melbourne (502 km via Ballarat, if / when route is reinstated). ➤ The top four containerised exports, by volume, from Port Adelaide are hay, grain, fresh fruit, and wine. These are significant in the above freight catchment region. ➤ Mildura Rural City Council is Australia's highest agriculture producing local government area (ABS Agriculture census 2021.22). ➤ Given the long distance to ports, rail should have a natural advantage in transporting intermodal freight and mineral sands & rare earth elements. However more than 80% of intermodal freight is going to port on road. This prevents the region from fully developing its export potential and meeting ESG obligations
<p>GHD Advisory key findings from the 2021 SMPL business case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Freight Demand – there is a significant gap in intermodal freight services market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 million tonnes of intermodal freight (exported in shipping container) by 2023 (in MRCC LGA & Sunraysia) ▪ 80% : 800,00 tonnes to be transported via road to port requiring 19 million truck kilometres p.a., ▪ Existing rail connections are a significant distance from the product and/or are in the opposite direction to the port' and not having a large, diversified freight catchment zone, to ensure trains are full all year ➤ Strategic location, support and economically viable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diversity and volume of produce will ensure all year-round freight demand and train utilisation ▪ The project has support from the road transport industry ▪ Potential freight demand of over 34,000 TEU pa across a range of products (note; these freight volumes are all currently going by road) ▪ Increased employment opportunities with up to 75 new jobs to be created ▪ The business case indicates a strong market opportunity and a project which is economically viable with benefits to cargo owners and the community. ▪ Iluka Resources have stated that the SMPL; 'would certainly be an important consideration in its assessment of the economic viability of developing its deposits'.
<p>Site</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The 78 Ha greenfield site has been surveyed and subdivision certified. Acquisition is under contract, for the benefit of Ouyen Inc ➤ It is 11 kilometres south of Ouyen and the Mallee Highway and is adjacent to the junction of the Sunraysia and Calder Highways. ➤ It is well positioned for rail freight to Melbourne, Adelaide as well as a connection to the transcontinental rail line. A new rail turning lane on the southwest corner of Ouyen would be needed for trains travelling to and from SA.
<p>Production in the SMPL freight catchment area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More than 1 million tonnes in 2033 (GHD Advisory) and forecast to increase to 1.44 million by 2035 (source; Murray Basin Rail – Which path to 2035? report) ➤ Hort Innovation 2023 report; 'Contribution of Australian horticulture industry'; the key findings include; 'Nationally, Northwest Victoria is the most significant horticultural region. Table grapes production in the region is projected to grow by 30 per cent while almonds will grow by 42 per cent by 2030' ➤ The region's largest citrus packhouse forecast a 30 to 40% increase in the next 5 to 7 years ➤ In the last six years in particular, export oaten hay has become a prominent industry in the region while grain continues to be a major exporter. ➤ 3 of the 4 largest Australian almond exporters, a clear majority of the 20 million cases of export table grapes in the MRCC LGA and Sunraysia region, 4 of the 10 largest Australian wineries, the 2 largest grain receival sites in the MRCC LGA, 780,000 Ha of dry land farming area suited for premium oaten hay exports, Australia's largest carrot farming enterprise, 2 large scale citrus pack houses (and numerous smaller houses),

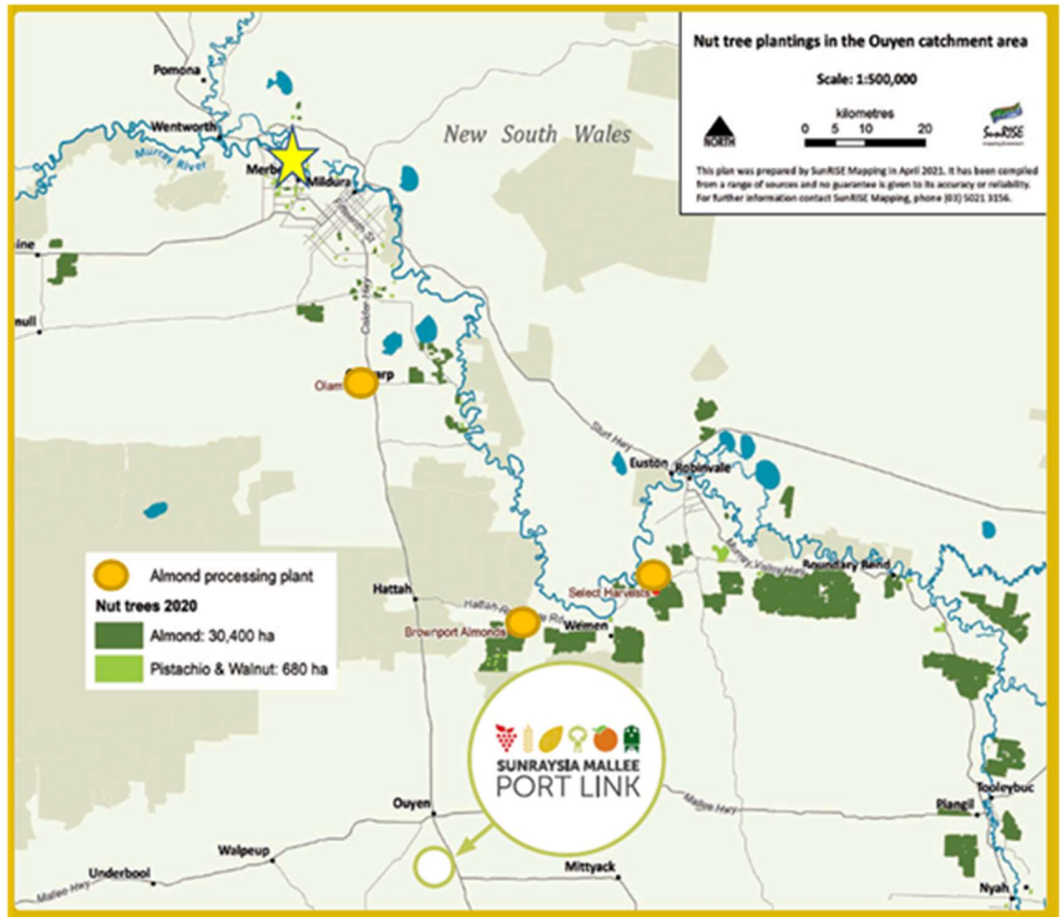
Location and freight catchment area

'Existing rail connections are a significant distance from where a majority of the plantings are located and/or are in the opposite direction to the port'

GHD Advisory

Almond plantings and processing facilities.

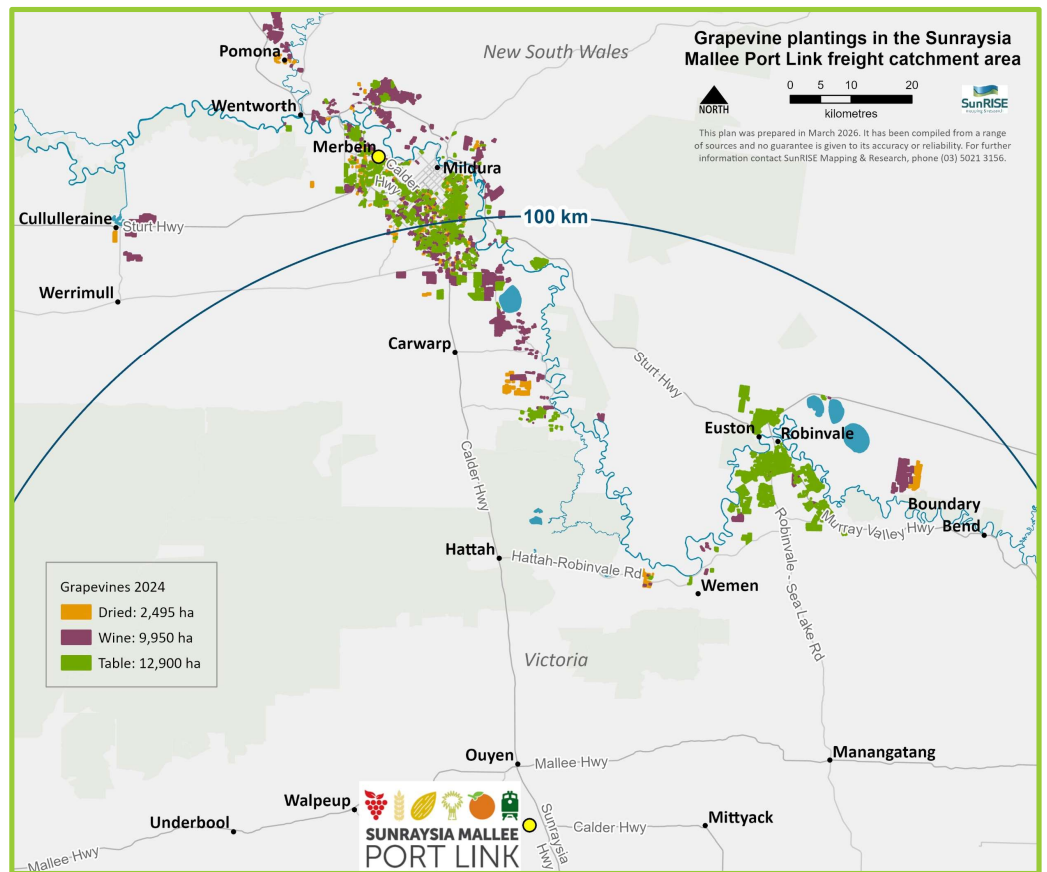
Three of Australia's four largest almond exporters are in the Sunraysia Mallee Port Link freight catchment region.



Grape plantings.

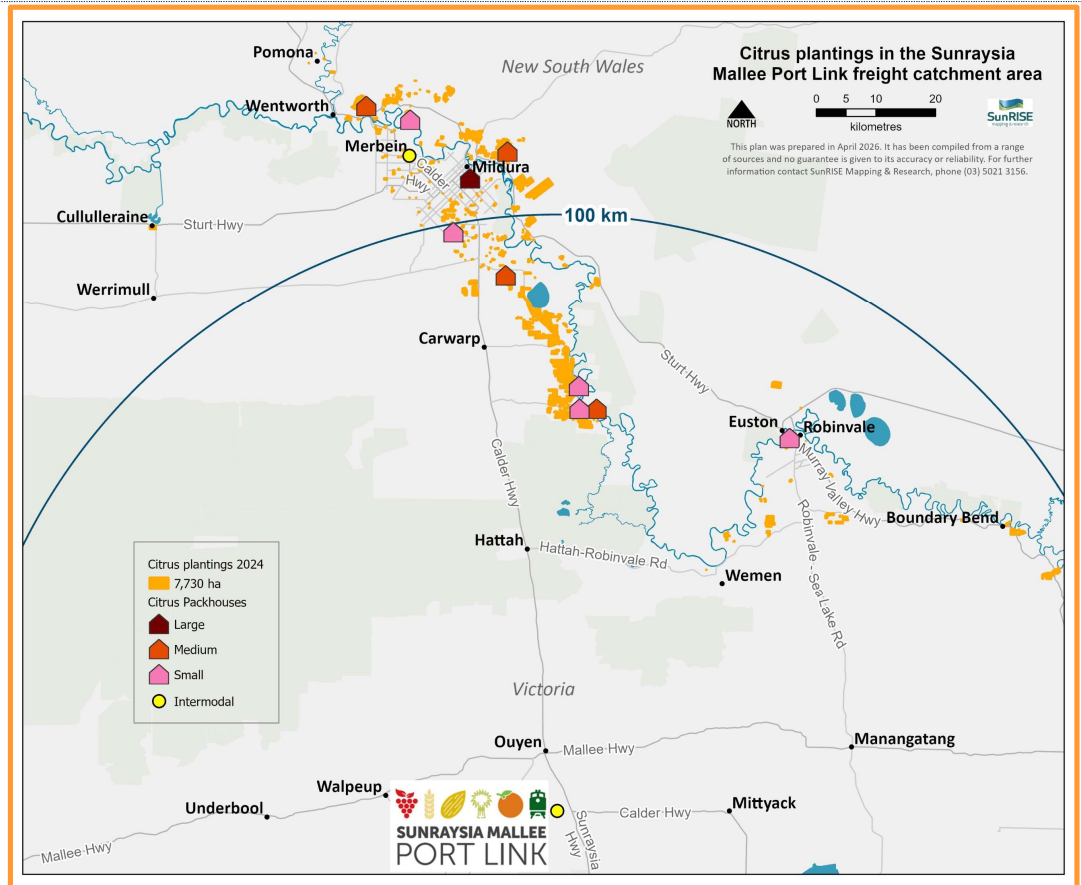
Table grapes. All grapes south of Mildura and from the Euston (NSW) and Robinvale (VIC) regions are ideal for rail freight to ports from SMPL

Wine: four of Australia's largest ten wineries are in the SMPL freight catchment region



Citrus plantings and packhouse facilities

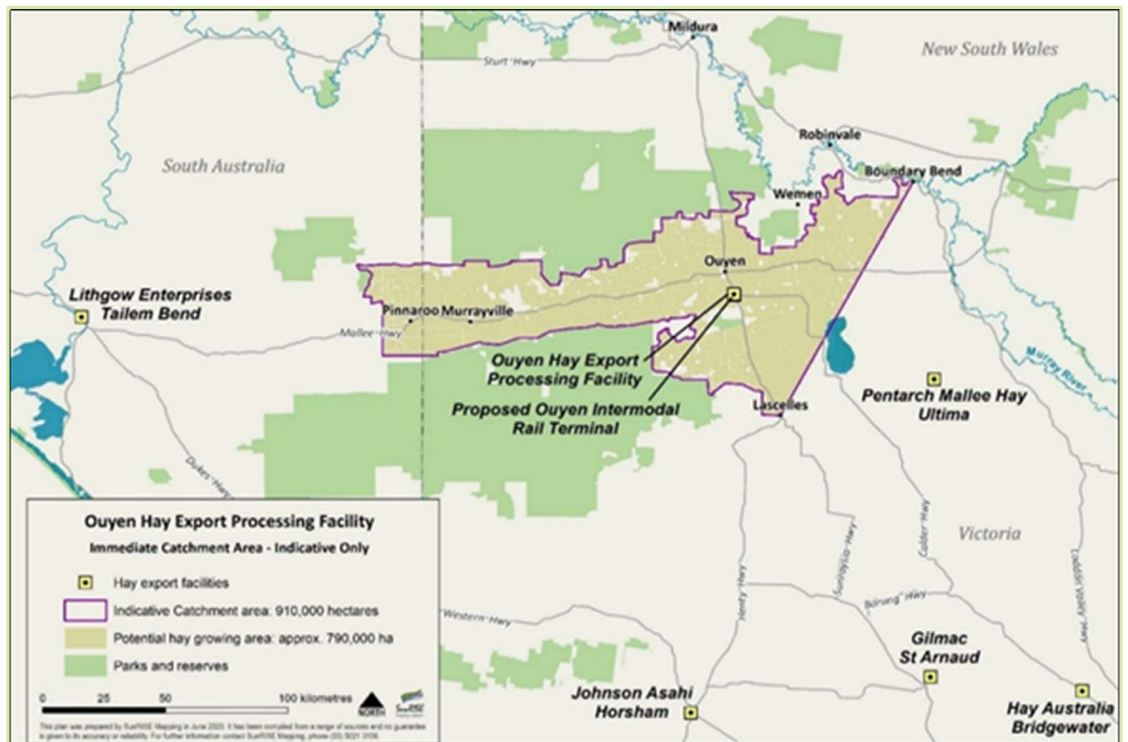
The largest packhouse and one medium size packhouse effectively fill the existing intermodal train at Merbein during the citrus season. The remaining eight packhouses in the SMPL freight catchment region, currently truck their exports to port.



Hay and containerised grain exports

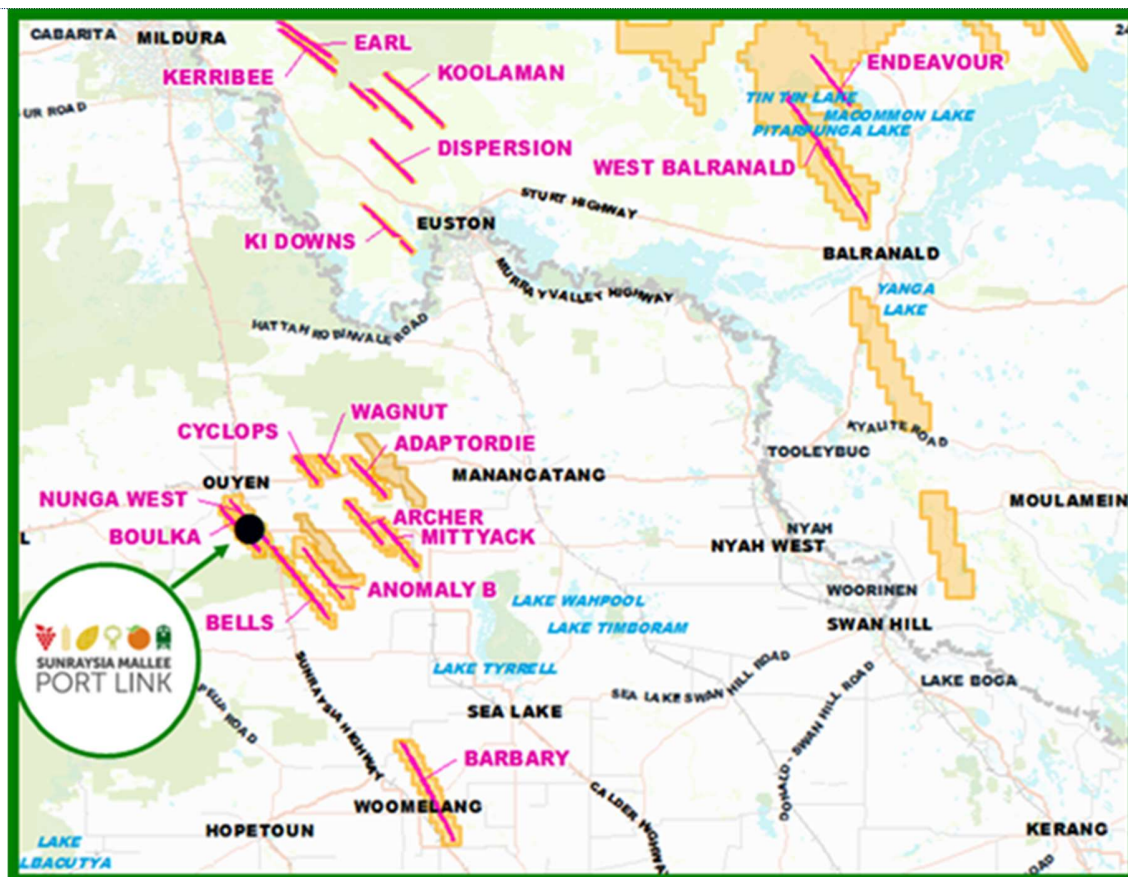
Currently all export hay & containerised grain from Mildura Rural City Council LGA is being trucked hundreds of kilometres (round trip) to other regions

The map shows the immediate catchment region and the location of a new hay export facility to be built at the SMPL site.



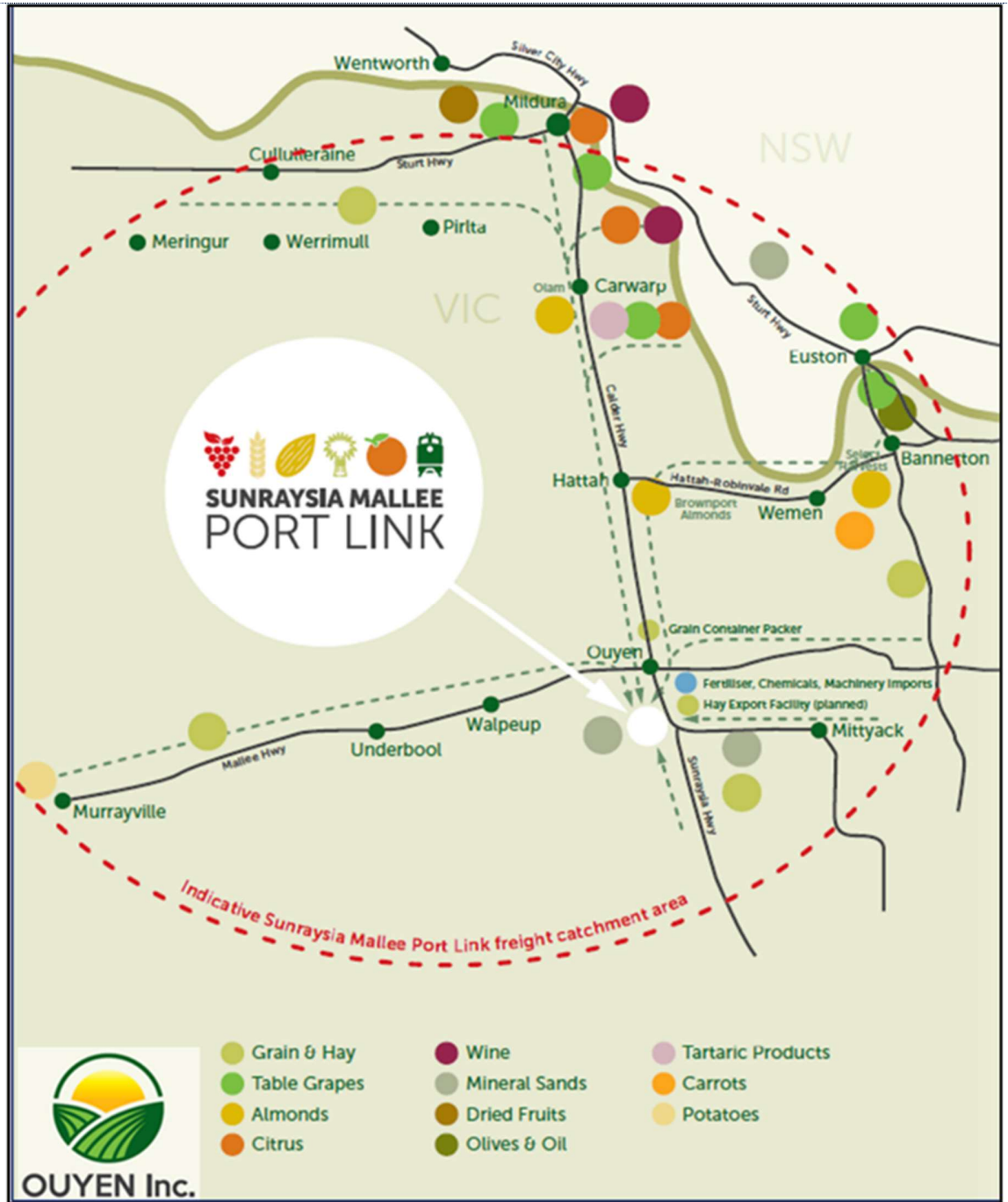
Mineral sands and rare earth elements.

Map showing the location of the Sunraysia Mallee Port Link in relation to mineral sand & rare earth deposits.



A large, diversified freight catchment region will ensure full trains all year, which drives efficiencies and lowers paddock / pit to port costs

Having dual rail access to container ports in Melbourne and Adelaide will give farmers, exporters and freight accumulators, the optionality to deliver product to the port of 'best fit' as well as deliver rail transport the much needed flexibility to react to market forces and supply chain disruptions





Getting Rail Freight Back on Rail Direct to Melbourne & Adelaide

Unlocking efficient, competitive and sustainable
freight pathways for northwest Victoria and beyond

The planned Sunraysia Mallee Port Link (SMPL) south of Ouyen, Vic. will deliver a critical missing connection in Australia's freight network: enabling direct efficient rail access from Sunraysia and Mallee regions to both Melbourne and Adelaide

A strategically located intermodal solution :

- Access to 10.4 million tonnes of intermodal freight set to go by road over next 10 years
- To attain 24 hour train cycles to Melbourne & Adelaide once rail paths are reinstated*
- Adjacent to one intrastate & two interstate highways

By increasing rail freight & improving 'paddock to port competitiveness, SMPL will:

- Lower freight costs for producers & exporters
- Strengthen supply chains for grapes, grain, citrus, hay, wine & almonds
- Unlock economic value adding potential & incentivise HMS & REE mining
- Reduce congestion and emissions on highways/freeways through to inner metro suburbs

The SMPL project urgently requires reinstatement of the **direct rail link to Melbourne** & reopening of the **northwest Victoria rail link to Adelaide***

Learn more or get involved: ouyen.vic.au



Appendix C. Letter from Hon Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Freight and Ports



The Hon Melissa Horne MP

Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ports and Freight
Minister for Roads and Road Safety

PO Box 2392
Melbourne, Victoria 3001 Australia

Ref: CMIN-1-25-8047

Mr Jason Wills
Co-Chair
Ouyen Inc
ouyencsecretary@ouyen.vic.au

Dear Mr Wills

Thank you for your email of 19 December 2025 on behalf of Ouyen Inc and various industry groups, calling for the reopening of the Taillem Bend to Murrayville rail line.

I am advised that on the Victorian side of the state border, the line between Murrayville and Panitya has not been used since 2009 and remains as an isolated section of Broad Gauge track disconnected from the Standard Gauge network. Re-activation of this section of line would require extensive track renewal and gauge conversion to Standard Gauge.

The reopening of the Murrayville to Taillem Bend rail line would therefore require a strong business case, supported by sufficient evidence of customers and expected freight flows to Ports to justify any rail infrastructure investment decision. My Department is aware of broader regional interest and continues to monitor this situation.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns. Your feedback is important to the Allan Labor Government as it continues to work hard to improve rail freight lines in Victoria.

Yours sincerely

Hon Melissa Horne MP
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ports and Freight
Minister for Roads and Road Safety
19/01/2026