



MEDIA RELEASE - OUYEN INC - Thursday 26 March '26

“Seven years On: Ouyen Inc Calls for Rail Fix to Boost Productivity and Cut Freight Costs”

Ouyen Inc is calling on the Victorian and Federal Governments to urgently complete the unfinished Murray Basin Rail Project (MBRP) and restore a direct rail link from northwest Victoria to Geelong and the Port of Melbourne.

With the State Election due in November, the organisation says now is the time to put the issue squarely on the agenda.

“After more than seven years of inaction since works stalled in 2019, this nation building project should be on every candidate’s radar,” Ouyen Inc committee member Dean Munro said. **“It is part of the National Freight Network and should be treated as such”**, he said

Since 2019, all freight trains along the Mildura line have been forced to detour via Ararat and Maroona, the foothill of the Grampians, adding 130 kilometres each way due to incomplete standard gauge works between Maryborough, Ballarat and North Geelong.

For the Mildura Rural City Council LGA, Australia’s highest agricultural earning region (ABS) the impact is significant. It and the Sunraysia area send more than 80% of their containerised freight of **fruit, wine, grain, hay and almonds by road needing 6 billion net tonne kilometres of truck movements over the next decade.** And that number could be the same again for the regions **export bulk grain where train transport is at its ‘all time’ lowest share since the transition to bulk handling in the 1940s–50s, Mr Munro said.**

Ouyen Inc’s agribusiness and logistics consultant, Michael O’Callaghan CA said, **“These inefficiencies are costing the Mildura Council area and Sunraysia region alone, hundreds of thousands of dollars each week, and it’s being felt directly at the farm gate, where returns are already under increasing strain from fuel and fertiliser price hikes,”** The inefficiencies are stifling investment in rail related infrastructure in the municipality including the Sunraysia Mallee Port Link intermodal facility just south of Ouyen and a bulk grain rapid train loading facility north of Ouyen

The problem extends beyond Sunraysia. In the Southern Mallee, grain trains, for example, from Birchip to Geelong are travelling 40% further and Cargill’s state-of-the-art grain facility can no longer do what it was built for: run a grain train to Geelong and back in a single day. “This is a system wide issue. Seven years on, the cost of not finishing the job continues to grow,” Mr O’Callaghan said.

Ouyen Inc’s Dean Munro is urging communities across the rail network, and beyond, to step up the pressure and hold all political parties to account on completing the Murray Basin Rail Project.

“The economic case, particularly given Australia’s productivity and carbon reduction challenges, is far stronger today than the 2015 business case used to initiate the project,” Mr Munro said.

“With an election approaching, now is the time for communities from Wentworth and Euston in southwest NSW through to Boort, St Arnaud and Maryborough, to demand clear commitments and hold candidates and parties to account; this project must be finished.”

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Birchip: An unfinished rail project is driving up costs, cutting productivity, and missing a clear carbon reduction opportunity. What should be a 389 km rail journey to Melbourne has stretched to 519 km since 2019, with trains forced to detour via the foothills of the Grampians. The impact is far reaching: Cargill’s state-of-the-art grain facility at Birchip can no longer do what it was built for: run a grain train to Geelong and back in a single day.