

Time for action, not railing
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While governments and the grain industry squabble over who should pay to repair the decaying transport network - road and rail - CBH is claiming international grain buyers have threatened to take their business elsewhere.

The bulk grain handler said buyers had a lot of choice and if WA could not provide grain where and when it was wanted, those buyers might take their ships and their orders elsewhere.

But WA Transport Minister Simon O'Brien has latched onto CBH's earlier admission that it had miscalculated demand in the deregulated market.

He said it was inaccurate for CBH to blame the rail network for its own shortcomings in planning for one of the State's biggest harvests.

The CBH warning comes against a backdrop of both State and Federal governments continuing to delay commitments to fund the State's dilapidated rail and road network, which requires a short and long-term fix.

CBH outgoing chief executive Imre Mencshelyi said it was ridiculous that the State's \$3-\$4 billion grain industry was being jeopardised, in part by the rail transport network's inability to meet the surge capacity required and repeated calls for the Government to immediately inject funds into rail.

The WA grain storer and handler this week also called for more trucks to meet the shortcomings of the rail network, exposed by the unprecedented demand post deregulation. Mr Mencshelyi said that at the moment more grain was going by road, which also had flow-on implications for the amount of investment required in the road network.

"Road transport volume is 30,000 tonnes per day while rail is in the order of 20,000-25,000 tonnes and we are looking to increase road transport by 4000-6000 tonnes a day," he said. Since the start of November, CBH said it had loaded 135 ships in 135 days and shipped 4.3 million tonnes, or a quarter of the State's grain crop.

At the start of the week it had 12 ships waiting at ports to load grain with another 10 expected to arrive in the next few days.

Mr Mencshelyi said rail was the most efficient way of moving large tonnages of grain but if the capacity required by industry could not be met the real concern was buyers would go elsewhere.

Mr O'Brien said the Federal Government was undertaking a short-term review of the Grain Infrastructure Group proposal.