

# the great southern farmer

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## Woolorama wrap-up

Next week



## Shearing school

Gnowangerup's latest graduates

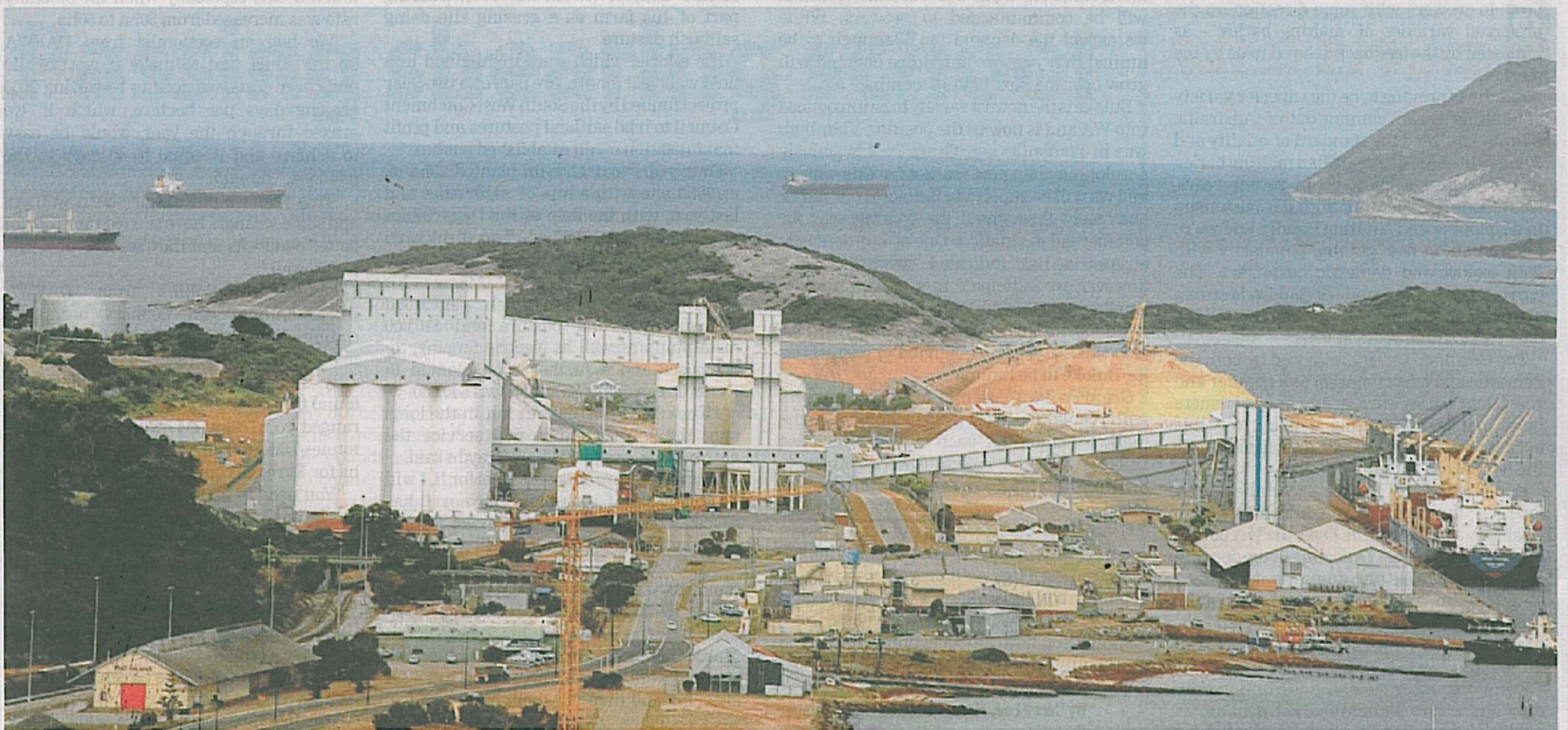
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## Our best stockhorse

McKinven rides to victory

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Ships wait in King George Sound while others are loaded at Albany Port. Picture: Laurie Benson

# Port still in bottleneck

By KATE MATTHEWS

CBH has put in place a revised shipping allocation system to relieve congestion at Albany's port after bottlenecks left grain ships in limbo for weeks waiting to be loaded.

Congestion has been a major problem for all ports since deregulation saw the number of exporters rise from two to 22 and the shipping period cut from 12 to three months to capitalise on the northern hemisphere winter.

Grain ships having been lined up outside Albany's harbour to load 15,000 to 54,000 tonne shipments of barely, wheat and canola destined for Singapore, China and Iran, and locally to Fremantle and Esperance.

CBH's revised shipping allocation

will see marketers submit an expression of interest in order to book shipping slots to export grain instead of booking ad hoc.

The system has been designed to regulate books on the shipping stem so monthly shipping requirements meet the capacity of the up-country transport network.

Albany Port Authority chief executive Brad Williamson said the bottlenecks were being experienced at all WA ports.

"It's quite common for ships to have to wait to be loaded, it's just unusual for Albany, which is a smaller port," Mr Williamson said.

While ships are waiting, the cost of demurrage isn't likely to have negative long-term effects with the cost of shipping dramatically falling, in some cases by 98 per cent,

making it significantly cheaper for exporters.

CBH grain operations general manager Colin Tutt said their standard monthly shipping figure had dramatically increased from 650,000 tonnes to 1.1 million across all ports.

In Albany, the figure has increased from 50,000 to 90,000 tonnes a week due to soaring demand by marketers.

But last year's late harvest and low-quality grain close to port are also playing a part.

To keep up with the demand, CBH has called in extra road resources carting another 2000 tonnes a day up from 8500 tonnes from outlying receivable points.

And it has put on two extra locomotives, but says funding is

desperately needed to maintain the railway tracks, which are owned by the State Government and leased to Westnet Rail.

Westnet Rail general manager Paul Larsen said \$200 million was needed for grain rail resleepering, \$150 million for upgrading rapid loading cells at CBH and \$50 million for upgrades to roads that fed grain to the rail network.

The upgrades would set up the industry for the next 15 years and had secured Federal funding, but the State Government failed to meet a March 1 deadline on its decision to fund its one-third share of costs for the rail rescue package, Mr Larsen said.

He said unless all funding requirements were met, it would mean the demise of the narrow

gauge rail network and grain freight would be forced to transfer to road to the tune of 300,000 extra heavy vehicle movements a year.

With an announcement likely at the end of the month, Mr Larsen was hopeful the State Government would come to the table.

Gnowangerup shire president Ken Pech has been calling on the government to make an immediate decision on the railway rescue package.

At present, grain is carted by road from Gnowangerup despite a railway spur sitting unused.

Mr Pech said they had major problems with roads, especially Chester Pass, which was constantly cut up from heavy transport, and CBH needed to upgrade its outloading facilities.