

State seeks to clear up rail

■ **Stuart McKinnon and Cally Dupe**

The State Government has floated plans to beef up WA's rail access regime to make it easier for third parties to use privately owned transport networks.

The existing regime is widely seen as unworkable because it fails to provide the required structure and certainty to act as an effective backstop when commercial negotiations between access seekers and railway owners fail.

Grain handler CBH is in a protracted battle with Arc Infra-

structure over access to its South West rail network, while historic efforts by small iron ore players in the Pilbara to use Fortescue Metals Group's rail line have been mired in dispute.

CBH has described the existing regime as unattractive, unwieldy and inefficient as a path to access.

In December, CBH revealed the two-year deadlock over long-term access to the WA grain train lines looked likely to spill into a third year.

The delay meant the company had to renew its interim access

agreement with Arc Infrastructure, formerly Brookfield Rail, before it expired on December 31.

An independent arbitrator had been expected to call an end to the deadlock by the end of last year.

CBH triggered an arbitration process with Arc in February 2016 after formal negotiations to gain long-term access to Arc's freight rail network failed.

Leaders of both parties last year declared the arbitrator's decision as final and agreed to set up a second interim agreement.

The WA Department of Treasury has consulted with stakeholders over the past year on potential reforms aimed at making the regime more effective.

The changes aim to strengthen the regime through greater transparency and more efficient processes.

They also seek to ensure prices better reflect the condition of each railway and its service potential, while ensuring railway owners can recover their costs and make a return on their investments.

Treasurer Ben Wyatt said effec-

tive railway access regulation played an important role in transporting goods as efficiently as possible to maximise WA's international competitiveness, particularly for key industries such as minerals and grain.

The Government has released a draft decision paper on the proposed changes, calling for stakeholder feedback by February 25.

The decision paper follows 14 stakeholder submissions received in response to an issues paper released in July last year.