

Labor vows \$22m to CBH for upgrade of grain rail

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A re-elected WA Labor government would spend \$22 million extending rail sidings at CBH's Moora, Brookton, Cranbrook and Broomehill receival sites to allow more wagons to fill with grain before heading to ports.

The election promise made last Wednesday would mark the biggest State Government investment in grain rail since 2010.

CBH and its 3900 grower members would also contribute \$80m to build rapid rail loading infrastructure at the four sites to speed up how fast grain can be loaded into trains.

The upgrades are expected to slash the time it takes to shunt and load a train at Moora from 11 hours to just over four, with similar improvements expected at the other three sites.

WA Transport Minister Rita Saffioti said the works would create 750 jobs during construction and deliver \$3m a year in export revenue.

Ms Saffioti met CBH to confirm the announcement at Kwinana Grain Terminal last week, saying the investment would

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Rita Saffioti

be made straight after the State election if WA Labor retained power.

The announcement was made as part of a \$72.7m investment pledge for agriculture and aquaculture expected to create up to 4000 jobs in the \$12 billion-a-year sector.

This included a new \$15m agriculture climate resilience fund to help farmers manage the threat of environmental changes and \$22m to upgrade priority agricultural freight rail projects.

Ms Saffioti said the rail funding would be allocated to CBH as a grant and the grain handler would be responsible for co-ordinating, tendering and contracting the work. About 60 per cent of WA's annual harvest is moved to port by rail each year, while the rest is moved by road.

The announcement followed last year's release of the Revitalising Agricultural Region Freight Strategy, which outlined priority and "shovel ready" projects in WA.

CBH chief executive Jimmy Wilson said much of the rail network was old and not built to accommodate a harvest that had grown 200 per cent over the past 30 years.

He said the State Government and CBH-funded upgrades would help growers get more tonnes to port during the "crucial first half of the year" before countries in the Black Sea region — Australia's biggest grain-producing competitors — harvest the annual crop, giving WA growers the "highest possible price for their grain".

"WA is home to the best growers in the world, but we are seeing increasing competition from low-cost, Black Sea producers," Mr Wilson said. "Investment by the State in these four rail siding projects will allow longer trains to be loaded at our key receival sites, avoiding costly inefficiencies in our supply chain.

"CBH intends to co-invest in rail loading infrastructure at those four sites to leverage the efficiency gains provided by the government-funded siding extensions."

All four of the projects are a mix of new or upgrading existing infrastructure with more details expected to be released in coming months.

WA Labor is currently preparing a business case to submit to Infrastructure Australia to potentially reopen three of the State's mothballed Tier 3 lines.

Ms Saffioti said there was strong sentiment from grain growers and community stakeholders for reinstating some of WA's Tier 3 grain lines.

The State Government hopes to attract funding from the Federal Government, through Infrastructure Australia, to reopen three of the lines in coming years.

"The Federal Government has committed to invest many billions in the eastern seaboard's Inland Rail project," Ms Saffioti said.