



28 February 2023

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network.

GrainGrowers welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport's inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network.

Efficient and safe roads are vital for Australia's \$13 billion grain industry to harvest and transport grain to market.

Repeated flood events and persistent and unprecedented rainfall has deteriorated critical road infrastructure across Australia's grain growing regions and exacerbated systemic long-term underfunding of our regional road network.

With climate change expected to increase the frequency and intensity of weather events such as heat waves, floods, and extreme temperatures, it is vital all levels of government use the current recovery period to strengthen Australia's long term road resilience.

Noting that there is significant research already underway on road resilience design, planning and construction, GrainGrowers would like to focus on the role of the Commonwealth Government for the purposes of this submission and makes the following recommendations:

1) Ensure sustainable road maintenance funding

Sustainable road maintenance funding is crucial in ensuring a resilient road network. As noted in the recently released Road and Rail Supply Chain Resilience Review report "Maintaining these assets is critical to ensure that they remain resilient to natural disasters ... Concepts such as betterment avoid additional reconstruction costs in the future and in making public assets more resilient, will ensure the infrastructure that supply chains rely on remain intact in disaster events."

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Indeed, many growers cited local examples across Australia of poorly maintained drains and damaged culverts causing additional water to pool on the road, intensifying the damage associated with the high rainfall.

Many rural local councils were already struggling to maintain their large road networks and the recent floods and high rainfall have only exacerbated the funding deficit. Several local councils have said they will have to close flood-impacted local roads as they cannot afford to repair them. Rural shires generally carry a greater financial burden in road infrastructure than other councils as a result of their relatively larger geographical area, small populations and lower revenue rating capacity. For instance, whilst inner city Port Phillip Council has 214km of road network, Buloke Shire in North West Victoria has 5381km.

To address these issues, GrainGrowers as part of the Rural Road Alliance is calling for an increase to the Roads to Recovery Program to \$800 million per year to support ongoing maintenance of the nation's local road infrastructure. The Program provides funding to all local government authorities and funding recipients are responsible for choosing road projects on which to spend their Roads to Recovery funding, based on their local priorities.

2) Encourage and facilitate coordination and information sharing across jurisdictions

With multiple levels of government involved in road management, it is crucial the Commonwealth Government encourages and facilitates coordination and information sharing across jurisdictions to avoid duplication and improve outcomes.

A key example of positive collaboration is Austroads' and the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) recent joint seminar showcasing Queensland's transport infrastructure resilience and response to weather events. The event provided a platform for all tiers of government and industry representatives to share their knowledge, experiences, and key learnings in disaster recovery management. In the opening address to the seminar, AustRoads Chair Neil Scales OBE reiterated that "partnership is key" when dealing with the increasing threat of climatic events on roads.

An additional project that could facilitate coordination is the development of a national approach to road resilience, which was recommended by the recent Road and Rail Supply Chain Resilience Review to ensure supply chain resilience is considered holistically across the network.

3) Providing targeted funding to ensure the long-term resilience of key freight networks

GrainGrowers also urges the Federal Government to provide targeted funding to ensure the adaptability of rural road network during and after natural disaster events.

Climate change is forecast to result in more frequent and intense climatic events. Road infrastructure is a long-lived investment, with roads typically have design lives of approximately 20 to 40 years. It is therefore it is crucial that investments are being made now in building resilience to emerging issues associated with natural disasters and climate risk.

The Commonwealth Government's Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) program is a critical tool in building resilience, delivering works such as road sealing, flood immunity, strengthening and widening, pavement rehabilitation, bridge and culvert upgrades and road realignments. ROSI focuses on improving corridors, compared to many other programs that only focus on upgrades to individual elements that do not address capacity issues along the selected route. Works involve rolling packages of upgrades to raise the standard of the full corridor, as opposed to just upgrading a single bridge or other bottleneck.

While acknowledging the current economic and labour constraints impacting infrastructure investment, GrainGrowers was deeply concerned to note that the funding allocated for ROSI decreased \$180.8 million between the March and October 2022-23 budgets and a further \$519.1 million in the forward estimates, despite the critical importance of this program. At the same time, according to Infrastructure Australia, the cost of construction materials has risen by an average 24 per cent in the last 12 months. GrainGrowers along with the Rural Road Alliance is calling for the ROSI program to be increased to \$900 million per year to improve the long-term resilience of freight networks.

GrainGrowers would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues further. Should we be able to provide further assistance or if there are any enquiries relating to our submission, please contact our Policy Manager, Trade and Supply Chains, Annabel Mactier via

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Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Zach Whale
General Manager, Policy and Advocacy
GrainGrowers