

**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing  
Committee on Transport & Regional Services**

**INQUIRY INTO THE INTEGRATION OF  
REGIONAL RAIL AND ROAD NETWORKS AND  
THEIR INTERFACE WITH PORTS**

**COMMITTEE HEARING IN ESPERANCE  
THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2006.**

**SUBMISSION BY THE SHIRE OF RAVENSTHORPE**

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## **Purpose**

The Shire of Ravensthorpe makes this submission on the occasion of a hearing by the Standing Committee on Transport & Regional Services in Esperance, within the Goldfields Esperance Region of Western Australia of which the Shire is an integral part.

It is also in response to the Committee's inquiry into the *Integration of Regional rail and Road Freight Transport and their Interface with Ports*.

## **The Submission Proponent**

The Shire of Ravensthorpe has a total area of 13,553 square kilometres, with 1221 kilometres of roads of which 242 kms are sealed. The shire has a population of 1,436 (ABS 2003), with the town of Ravensthorpe's population being approximately 450. The other principal town in the shire is Hopetoun, with an estimated population of 350, although this is now growing rapidly with housing developments arising from the new Ravensthorpe Nickel Operation who will locate half their residential production workforce there when mining operations commence later this year.

The shire has 1,004 electors and 766 dwellings and it directly employs 20 people.

It's regional economy is based on grains and sheep, with mining now redeveloping into a major part of the local economy. There is also a service industry which is presently changing its profile to meet the needs of present and future times. Tourism also plays an important role particularly with visitation to the coastal locations and Fitzgerald River National Park, core of the internationally renown Fitzgerald Biosphere.

## **Issues**

South Coast Highway provides the major arterial transport linkage across the Shire of Ravensthorpe from west to east, and is the principle way in which products can be taken from or brought into the area. There is no railway and little likelihood of there ever being one, so all the material movements requiring export from or import into the shire rely on the highway to get to the Port of Esperance. This traffic is growing steadily with agriculture and now with mining coming again, the volume is set to ramp up to another level of magnitude.

The Shire of Ravensthorpe is part of a watershed or catchment area for transport linkages to the port of Esperance from the Lakes District to its west & north west. Substantial tonnages of grain are roadhauled from as far afield as the Kulin and Lake

Grace areas across our western boundaries and then along the South Coast Highway to Esperance.

Fertiliser is back-loaded from Esperance into these districts as well as the Shire itself, once again accounting for large movements of material on the highway..

In addition and because of its agricultural economy, other commodities road transported on the route include livestock (sheep, cattle and pigs) and wool, moving principally westward from Esperance through Ravensthorpe and on to Albany, Perth and other destinations in the state's south west.

Recent vehicle counts carried out by Main Roads WA indicate the following level of Class 10-12 (trucks and road trains) on South Coast Highway between Ravensthorpe and Esperance:

December 2004	173 per day
January 2005	113 per day
March 2005	109 per day
June 2005	112 per day

(These figures are averaged over measuring periods ranging from 21 to 55 days.)

In the two year period January 2004 to December 2005 a continuous vehicle counter operating near Dalyup approx 30 kms west of Esperance on South Coast Highway, yielded indicative data that showed Class 10-12 trucks comprised a total of 20,315. These comprised local, regional and national hauliers – all using the section of the highway under discussion.

There is also a growing bulk mineral commodity traffic along South Coast Highway and this will become much more evident once the large Ravensthorpe Nickel Operation (BHP Billiton) comes on stream in 2007. It will send nickel concentrate from the minesite 35 kms east of Ravensthorpe, to the port of Esperance for shipping around the Australian coast to a refinery located at Yabulu near Townsville in Queensland.

The present substantial road traffic on the highway, combined with the projected increases occurring within the next eighteen months or so give rise to considerable regional concern that safety issues will become more acute unless considerable upgrading works are funded and carried out. Already it is perceived that passing lanes, road widening and certain bridge upgrades are necessary and while this is being progressively implemented under current funding arrangements, these are necessarily slow and by no means all embracing.

There is also a conflict between regional and national road haulage traffic i.e. between the area's economic activity and those of adjacent or further away parts of WA or other states. All road freight heading from the Eastern States into the south west of WA comes along the South Coast Highway through Ravensthorpe and this is growing with the state's current upswing in activity and present prosperity. This adds to the mix when it comes to pressure on the highway and the need for substantial improvement.

Also in recent times (five to seven years) the capacity of the average road train has grown to a 70 tonne nett load, once again creating situations where other drivers on the road such as tourists and commuters who travel the route year round, find passing difficult and sometimes downright dangerous. Upgrading works are urgently needed in a number of places and the funding for this to take place in a reasonably short time frame seems hard to find under present arrangements.

## **General**

Future projections of the needs of the South Coast Highway between the Shire of Ravensthorpe and the Port of Esperance suggest we will only gain a satisfactory outcome to the needs and expectations of our community if we closely link ourselves to the newly developing Federal and State Government policies of road funding and maintain our representations to both to obtain an efficient and safe transport linkage servicing the needs of our area and its adjoining centres and destinations.

The growth of the western region of the area under consideration at today's hearing in Esperance is substantial and driven essentially by long term mineral developments. Nickel, gold, copper and other base metals are included within the potential and developing economy and a two-fold population expansion is anticipated within the Shire of Ravensthorpe within the next eighteen months. The residential workforce commitment by Ravensthorpe Nickel means that prosperity will translate into local development and transport linkages provided by South Coast Highway will come under more pressure from this quarter as a result.

Today's presentations have provided a clear picture of what faces this region at present as a result of recent and impending economic growth and a great deal of this will occur along the transport linkage provided between the Shire of Ravensthorpe and the Port of Esperance.

## **Recommendations**

- (1) South Coast Highway between the Shire of Ravensthorpe and the Port of Esperance to be funded in future as a Road of National Importance (RONI) or categorised within the AustLink network.
- (2) Strong support is given to other submissions here which advocate protection of the transport corridor into the Port of Esperance. Any nearby land development should be devoted to general industry and not residential or other classifications permitting potential human habitation. The importance of this linkage to the port from South Coast Highway is vital for the future export of grains and other products from Esperance.