

MEDIA RELEASE

Movement of Rail Freight - an 'Essential Service' During COVID-19 Pandemic

Australia's rail freight sector is facing an unprecedented challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic but continues to meet the demands from their customers, suppliers and business partners.

Each year more than 450 billion tonne kilometres of freight is moved by rail. This volume is expected to grow by more than 35% by 2040.

ARA CEO Caroline Wilkie said rail freight operators continue to support their suppliers and partners during the economic upheaval, but need confirmation from state and federal governments that they are an 'essential service'.

"With state borders around the country closing, rail freight is more important than ever. It needs to be clear that essential services such as rail freight movements can continue during this time", said Ms Wilkie.

"The COVID-19 situation is unlike anything we have faced, but rail freight is providing the backbone to our nation's supply chain during these challenging times. Our members are keeping freight moving, ensuring that essential goods such as canned food, toilet paper and cleaning products continue to get to where they need to be."

"Freight rail operators are working overtime to respond to freight demand both safely and responsibly. Self-isolation and social distancing protocols are being implemented, as well as modified rostering to keep employees out of harm's way."

"Additional hygiene controls and cleaning arrangements have also been adopted which has put a strain on the availability of hand sanitisers and detergents. Many of our members have reported difficulties in obtaining an adequate supply of these essentials for their employees".

Rail freight operators are looking closely at the national supply chain to identify opportunities to ensure more efficient and productive delivery of rail freight.

"We appreciate the need to keep critical passenger train services moving in our cities but if we see a reduction in passenger services on metropolitan networks, rail freight access should be increased to these networks to facilitate the transport of essential goods. This could include modifications to current curfews to increase frequency and availability of freight services," she said.

Improved rail freight productivity also helps provide resilience in the face of emergencies.



“Productive supply chains are what help keep the country running. Investment in rail freight and reforms to prescriptive and onerous legislative requirements help builds a productive supply chain.”

ARA is holding regular meetings with freight and passenger rail operators as well as those ports, contractors, suppliers, consultants and manufacturers in the rail supply chain.

ENDS

24 March 2020

For comment by Ms Wilkie contact Mal Larsen 0423 783 667