



Minister urges fund applications

Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Member for Gippsland Darren Chester told SEATS delegates at Lakes Entrance, 'good infrastructure can change people's lives and save lives'. He particularly noted the need for infrastructure that would reduce road trauma.

He urged the region to ensure it received its fair share of the \$50 billion the Australian Government is rolling out on infrastructure between 2014 and 2020.

Victoria, he said, needs to 'reimagine' the road from Sydney to Melbourne via Gippsland (e.g. with better rest areas, walking trails etc) and market the route and south east Australia better to tourists, akin to the Great Ocean Road.

Some delegates said they thought manufacturing could deliver better outcomes than tourism, but manufacturing in East Gippsland and the south-east region struggled with road and rail



Federal Minister
Darren Chester

connectivity. That infrastructure, they said, should be targeted for funding.

The Minister said more funding opportunities for infrastructure would become available after 2020 with the completion of many major projects. SEATS needed to be in a position to 'sell' its priority projects to attract that funding. He praised SEATS for identifying these projects and advocating for their funding at every opportunity

On rail, he is open to discuss possible funding for NSW rail projects. He noted the Federal Government is currently working closely with NSW on the freight-driven inland rail project from Brisbane to Melbourne.

Other issues raised with the Minister were:

- the economic impact of the lack of mobile phone coverage in the region
- the need to retain Roads to Recovery and Black Spot funding.



SEATS delegates, right, heard first hand at Lakes Entrance about freight issues experienced by Lakes Entrance Fisherman's Cooperative (LEFCOL) and Vegco-One Harvest in getting their products to market. See p. 4.

Gippsland faces infrastructure issues

State Member for Gippsland East Tim Bull outlined to SEATS delegates the infrastructure challenges that he sees face the Gippsland region.

While several roads projects had been completed or were underway, he was concerned that Government investment in the region's roads had been reduced over the previous two years. The Government had also scrapped the Country Roads and Bridges Program which reduced funding to councils which need more money to maintain country roads.

On rail, he said having predominantly a single rail line with no dedicated line into Melbourne were major regional issues. He suggested SEATS should make the Stratford rail bridge a priority project.

Among other issues he raised were:

- the Coalition remains committed to Port of Hastings' development as a second port.
- Melbourne needed a third major airport and that should be built east or south-east of Melbourne, recognising the region's growth.

He spoke at length about the impact the closure of Hazelwood power station and Heyfield hardwood mill will have on the Gippsland region. On timber supply to Heyfield, he said there is a need to find a balance between conservation and responsible hardwood timber harvesting.



State Member for Gippsland East Tim Bull

Princes as national highway

SEATS will soon circulate a petition calling for the Princes Highway from Gwynneville (near Wollongong) to Sale to be included in the National Highway Network.

SEATS Deputy Chair Cr Marianne Pelz (East Gippsland) successfully moved a motion for the petition at the February meeting, the wording to be finalised by the executive.

It will call for urgent and ongoing funding for the Highway and for it to be recognised as a major freight and tourist route. It will be sent to all councils in SEATS region and then forwarded to the Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester for tabling in both Houses.

When asked for comment, Minister Chester said he was not sure what it would achieve; many want to see a lot of roads on the National Network but that won't necessarily lead to increased funding. He has long supported the upgrade of the Princes Highway but suggested it was probably better to seek 'off network funding'.

He added SEATS' Transport Strategy provided a good basis to do that.

SEATS Chairman speaks...



SEATS Executive meets Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester: Greg Pullen (Shoalhaven), left, Cr Marriane Pelz (East Gippsland), Cr Keith Cook (Baw Baw), Minister Chester, John Duscher (SEATS EO), Cr Sue Whelan OAM (Queanbeyan-Palerang), Mark Burnett (East Gippsland) SEATS Chair Cr Patricia White (Shoalhaven), Cr Jeremy Rich (South Gippsland), and Cr Clare LeServe (Bass Coast).

SEATS' February meeting at Lakes Entrance was hosted by East Gippsland Shire Council. My thanks to Deputy Mayor Cr Colin Toohey for his warm welcome and profile of the shire, and to Cr Marianne Pelz and Mark Burnett for organising such a productive meeting.

High among regional concerns were the impacts from the imminent closure of Hazelwood power station and the intended closure of the Heyfield timber mill.

Our 40 delegates included several new delegates. This was also a chance to finally appoint three new Victorian members to our Executive – Cr Keith Cook from Baw Baw Shire, Cr Jeremy Rich from South Gippsland Shire and Cr Clare Le Serve from Bass Coast Shire.

We were honoured to have two Ministers address the meeting – Federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Member for Gippsland Darren Chester, and Victorian State Member for Gippsland East Tim Bull. More on their and other presentations are in this newsletter.

A highlight at Lakes Entrance was the visit to two successful local businesses – LEFCOL and VEGCO-One Harvest. Industry visits enable delegates to gain an appreciation of transport issues and challenges local businesses face every day. One suggestion at Lakes Entrance was to sometimes have a workshop instead of an industry visit and invite local transport companies along.

SEATS' website is now under new management. The website has to be up-to-date and relevant if SEATS is to maintain its credibility as a peak lobby group.

We have also set up a working party to update SEATS' Business and Marketing Strategy, headed by Ralf Kastan, Robyn Cooney and Cr Anthony Mayne. Please contact them or myself with any suggestions. We hope to have a draft ready for the May meeting in Eurobodalla Shire. I hope to see you there.

Cr Patricia White
Chairman

Gippsland's rail neglect highlighted

Neglect of Gippsland's rail network was mentioned on several occasions at SEATS' Lakes Entrance meeting, but highlighted in the presentation on the *Gippsland Rail Needs Study*. This Study was outlined to delegates by Latrobe City Council's General Manager City Development Phil Stone.

It was done by rail industry consultant John Hearsch for the Gippsland Local Government Network (GLGN) and since been endorsed by GLGN's six member councils. It will form the basis of their advocacy to Government for more

public investment in rail infrastructure 'to grow the region'. SEATS will consider its endorsement at its next meeting.

Stone said the Gippsland main line railway links major towns and them with Melbourne, yet the line has been neglected compared with other regional mainlines in Victoria. It is primarily a passenger railway but its infrastructure is inadequate and it has the slowest and most unreliable services in the State.

While this Study primarily focussed on improvements needed over the next 15 years to enhance passenger services and their contribution to the region's social and economic development, it also outlined the railway's potential to serve as an important freight corridor.

Rail freight currently plays a small role in



The Gippsland Rail Needs Study notes the historic railway bridge over the Avon River at Stratford is over 100 years old and needs replacing to enable freight trains to run from Bairnsdale to Melbourne and passenger trains to travel at normal speeds. Photo taken from the Gippsland Rail Needs Study.

Gippsland's economy but has substantial potential. Stone said investments to improve passenger services would also enable rail freight services to again be offered along the whole length of the corridor to Bairnsdale.

On passenger and connecting coach services, the study's recommendations include improvements in service frequency, in time taken through the metropolitan area, and increased investment in infrastructure such as stations and bridges and replacing outdated carriages.

On the Gippsland network as a freight corridor, benefits would include:

- Being able to move mineral and forest products and large volumes of finished goods such as paper products (already occurs) through the region, removing them from the Princes Highway with road safety, efficiency and environmental benefits.
- Conveying containers to port, at this stage the Port of Melbourne, and from port to the region if appropriate intermodal transfer facilities and services could be developed. Morwell would be a rail freight centre.

A major issue is that freight trains cannot operate beyond Sale (to Bairnsdale) because of the old Avon River Bridge at Stratford. Even passenger services have to slow to 10kph to cross it.

Delegates also heard that Public Transport Victoria's *Regional Network Development Plan* includes business cases for replacing the Avon River bridge, track duplication between Longwarry and Bunyip, and design of new passing loops throughout the region where there is only a single line. These cases were developed in association with GLGN representatives.

The *Gippsland Rail Needs Study* is on SEATS' website.

Victoria has 30-year strategy

Infrastructure Victoria (IV) Strategy and Research Director Adele McCarthy outlined to SEATS delegates Victoria's first ever cross-sector infrastructure strategy for the next 30 years. IV is an independent authority.

The Strategy's broad recommendations include many designed to relieve road congestion and address the transport and freight needs of regional Victoria. See SEATS' website.



Infrastructure Victoria's Adele McCarthy

IV has since released a discussion paper on the future need, timing and location options for a second container port for Victoria including the Port of Hastings. Formal submissions closed 3 April.

IV will present its advice to the Government in May.

Gippsland businesses talk transport

SEATS delegates visited two successful Gippsland businesses in February – Lakes Entrance Fishing Co-operative (LEFCOL) and Vegco-One Harvest at Bairnsdale.

The major transport issue that emerged during these visits was frustrations with night roadworks into Melbourne, but knowing ultimately it will be to their advantage. Other issues included the lack of overtaking lines heading north, and congestion on free-ways into Melbourne affecting daytime deliveries.

Over the last few years LEFCOL has upgraded their whiting processing line at Lakes Entrance and entered into a partnership with PFD Food Services as their wholesaler.

'This enables us to sell our fresh Lakes Entrance caught fish to Sydney, Adelaide and Canberra as well as Melbourne,' said LEFCOL manager Brad Duncan. 'We also batter and crumb our product to sell frozen in the wholesale market, including in Queensland.

'It gives us a strong marketing advantage because we're meeting the desire from consum-



SEATS delegates are shown through LEFCOL's processing plant at Lakes Entrance.

ers to eat Australian product and to be assured of its provenance.'

LEFCOL uses outside transport companies with two trucks leaving for Melbourne fish markets each evening.

One Harvest is a third-generation family business providing value-added freshcut packs of salads to over 2,000 supermarkets and greengrocers around Australia. It has plants in most states.

One Harvest uses Vegco as its name in Victoria. Its Bairnsdale plant is in the heart of the Gippsland's vegetable growing area yet within reasonable reach of major retail markets. It employs 303 people, and handles 50 different vegetables from about 40 growers.

Vegco averages nine trucks into plant a day (owned and outsourced) bringing produce from farms as well as some interstate freight.

An average of 12 trucks a day leave for Melbourne, Wodonga, NSW and South Australia. The trucks are mainly Dyers, but also Bonaccord and Lindsay Bros.



From Vegco Powerpoint, courtesy Vegco

What is SEATS?

South East Australian Transport Strategy (SEATS) aims to stimulate and facilitate investment in transport and infrastructure in south eastern NSW, eastern Victoria and the ACT. Its 50 members represent councils, industry and other organisations from Wollongong to Dandenong.

New Batemans Bay bridge

Geotechnical investigations for a new bridge across the Clyde River at Batemans Bay started late March. A new bridge will improve freight access by allowing higher semi-trailers and B-doubles, and improve travel times and safety.

Coastal freight shipping

The Australian Government seeks comment on a discussion paper on proposed regulatory changes to ensure coastal shipping plays a greater role in domestic long distance freight. Submissions due 28 April.

SEATS attends Assembly

Several SEATS executive members will attend the National General Assembly of Local Government in Canberra (18-21 June).

SEATS meetings

18-19 May: Hosted by Eurobodalla Shire Council, at Batemans Bay.

17-18 August: Hosted by Wellington Shire Council, Victoria.

9-10 November: Hosted by Canberra Airport at Canberra Airport.

2018

14-15 February: Hosted Victoria.

TBA

SEATS Executive

Chairman Cr Patricia White

(Shoalhaven), **Deputy Chair** Cr Marianne Pelz (East Gippsland),

Secretary Cr Graeme Middlemiss (Latrobe), **Treasurer:** Mark Burnett (East Gippsland).

Victorian representatives: Cr Keith Cook (Baw Baw) Cr Jeremy Rich (South Gippsland), Cr Clare Le Serve (Bass Coast).

NSW representatives: Greg Pullen (Shoalhaven), Cr Marianne Saliba (Shellharbour), Cr Sue Whelan OAM

NHVR-SEATS forums

Possible future joint workshops or forums with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) in conjunction with a SEATS meeting was one outcome of the February SEATS meeting.

NHVR's Simone Reintsen spoke about the trial of the new Road Manager portal and heavy vehicle permits. She said the NHVR was there to work with councils and industry to improve productivity and safety in the freight task and keep local economies strong.