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MEDIA RELEASE

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Inland Rail link needs objective analysis not political fighting fund

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor is urging inland rail enthusiasts not to politicise the current feasibility study into the possible routes for a North-South rail corridor.

Recent media reports indicate that a group of western NSW Councils and industry representatives will establish a 'fighting fund' to push for a route to go through Coonamble.

"The consultants undertaking the study are investigating the major infrastructure requirements for rail to serve the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane corridor (and feeder regions) into the future, the various route options and provide passenger and freight projections for the coming decades.

They indicated at a meeting that I had with them that they have 83 different combinations that they are investigating and putting together the pro's and con's of each.

They are doing this without political interference and if the consultants haven't presented their findings already to the Minister, they will do so in the very near future," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor was commenting on recent media reports about a 'fighting fund' being established to lobby the Government for a rail link from Melbourne to Brisbane through Narrabri and Moree by a group in the north-west of the State.

"I believe it is important that all interested groups make a contribution to the debate on an inland rail link but the final decision should be based on the objective information gathered by the consultants rather than who has the biggest lobby group.

If the decision is based purely on politics, it will undermine the integrity of the process the government has put in place.

The decision needs to be made on the 'best location' in terms of freight loadings, distance and very importantly the potential for private enterprise to benefit from the economics and efficiencies gained by the development of an inland rail route," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said that it was important to realise that the study includes Sydney/Brisbane freight as well as Melbourne to Brisbane freight – a fact which is perhaps overlooked by some.

Mr Windsor points to freight estimates of the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (BTRE) of 2001 which indicate the following tonnages for the 'North-South' Rail Corridor that show

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Sydney – Melbourne 25m tonnes
Sydney – Brisbane 20m tonnes
Melbourne – Brisbane 6m tonnes

“When one adds the coal freight projections of 30m tonnes from the Werris Creek/Gunnedah basin, as well as 2m tonnes of wheat, the Werris Creek – Newcastle link becomes the highest freight load section of the line – in fact the highest freight loadings of any line in NSW.

Werris Creek – Newcastle	32m tonnes
PLUS	
Sydney – Brisbane	20m tonnes
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Total	52m tonnes

When compared with the 6m tonnes on the Melbourne to Brisbane route, the obvious priority for the upgrade of a northern route becomes the Newcastle to Werris Creek line which opens the opportunity for a Queensland link either via Tamworth or Gunnedah.

The existing Melbourne-Brisbane freight equates to two trains per day which could connect with Werris Creek via the Binnaway-Dubbo line which has had \$57m funding already committed by the Government through the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) for its upgrade.

It would be an appalling planning process if that was spent and then the line not be used as part of the north-south corridor.

If the Inland Rail link becomes a political football, the silver stake driven into the ground at Goondiwindi in the lead up to the 2001 election will continue to be a monument to a good idea killed off by petty squabbling.

Let the line be built where it creates the best investment for the Nation. Let it be built based on facts not professional fighting funds.

That process is a recipe for government to do nothing,” Mr Windsor said.