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Government

DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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BY:.....

Chief Executive Officer
5th Floor, Energy House
18-20 Cavenagh Street
Darwin NT 0800
Postal GPO Box 2520
Darwin NT 0801
Tel (08) 8924 7233
Fax (08) 8924 7044
Web www.dpi.nt.gov.au

Mr John Eren, MP
Road Safety Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne VICTORIA 3002

Submission No. LC/8
Received
Road Safety Committee

Dear Mr Eren, MP

Thank you for your letter of 20 August 2007 advising of the opportunity to provide a submission for the Inquiry into Improving Safety at Level Crossings.

Prior to the building of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway in 2000, there were 44 level crossings in the NT. These crossings were installed in the 1980s when the railway line was upgraded to standard gauge, but were reviewed and upgraded during the construction of the new railway line to Darwin.

With the completion of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line, there are now 229 level crossings in the NT, of which 31 are active. Of the active crossings, 8 are fitted with boomgates. The level crossings on the railway line were designed and installed to standards that exceeded industry best practice at the time to allow for increase in both rail and road usage.

The Northern Territory Government continues to be committed to improving safety at level crossings. Following two significant level crossing crashes in late 2006, the Chief Minister announced the following measures to address level crossing safety in the NT:

1. **Education:** increasing level crossing safety education and awareness campaigns;
2. **Sanctions:** increasing fines for non compliance with traffic signals at level crossings from \$80 to \$500 and three demerit points;
3. **Enforcement:** increasing NT Police enforcement activity at level crossings; and
4. **Assessment and industry awareness:** undertaking an assessment of all level crossings in the NT, including any changes in industry usage of level crossings since the commencement of rail services.

In respect of point 4 above, I can advise that my Department has recently completed an assessment of all level crossings in the NT. This process has included a reassessment of all level crossings using the nationally agreed Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM). In addition to this process, all pastoral lease holders and mining operators in the NT were contacted to reinforce level crossing safety awareness and to ascertain detailed level crossing usage data for inclusion into the assessment.

A report has been drafted and will soon be considered by Cabinet. Although I am not in a position to discuss the report in any detail, I can advise that it includes the need to consider current as well as emerging technologies, from both a road and rail perspective, to improve safety at level crossing.

In addition, the following existing and new and emerging technologies are in use or being considered for use in the NT.

1. Existing Technology in use in NT

- a. **Boomgates**
Boomgates have been installed on level crossings where there are high speed road approaches to the level crossings and where the risk of collision is considered very high.
- b. **Solar Panels**
Active level crossings in the remote areas of NT are powered by batteries charged by solar panels. This use of solar panels has enabled the installation of active crossings in areas where in the past it has been impractical to consider active crossings.

2. New and Emerging Technology

- a. **Advance Warning Signs and Lights**
The NT Level Crossing Safety Committee is proposing the use of advance warning signs with flashing lights, indicating to the approaching road user that the level crossing lights have been activated. While these devices are in use on the NT road network as advanced warning for traffic signals, extending the use to level crossings is viewed as a positive safety measure.
- b. **Low Cost Active Controls for Level Crossings**
The cost of active controls for level crossings in the NT is high. A low cost but effective alternative would be of considerable benefit where there is low road vehicle volumes and infrequent train services but the need for active controls. The NT in conjunction with the rail infrastructure owner would consider the use of these technologies to improve safety at remote sites.

Should you require any further information regarding level crossing safety in the NT please contact Julius Sigut, Manager Rail Safety, on telephone (08) 8924 7208.

Yours sincerely



ROD APPLGATE
A/Chief Executive Officer

19 September 2007