

Submission No. LC/41
Received
Road Safety Committee



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12 October 2007

Mr John Eren MP
Chair
Road Safety Commission
Parliament House
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

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BY:.....

Dear Sir

The Australian Sugar Milling Council Pty Limited (ASMC) is the representative body of the owners and operators of the 23 Queensland raw sugar mills. The Council has welcomed the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Road Safety Committee inquiry into improving safety at level crossings.

The Council's purpose in taking this opportunity is that the product of any Government inquiry - State or Federal has the potential to become a reference document for further studies or action beyond its original intention. Accordingly, the operators of the Queensland cane rail transport system see it as appropriate to try to gain consideration of issues affecting the industry and level crossing safety management.

The level crossing safety management issues that the industry faces are not unique to this industry. However, the Queensland cane rail transport system is distinctive in that it operates low speed trains with the purpose of carrying a single freight item - sugar cane. Importantly, it carries no passengers or dangerous goods. It operates in a predominantly rural/regional environment however most mills' networks traverse some towns and one traverses Cairns city.

The industry operates a unique rail transport system. Some of its characteristics are: -

- It is privately owned and operated;
- There are eleven separate rail networks serving 20 sugar mills operated by eight different owners;
- The industry moves in excess of 30 million tonnes of freight annually from farms to the mills in the approximately 22 week crushing season;
- It has in excess of 4,000km of line (estimated);
- Approximately half of that is mainline and the remainder is branch lines, loops and mill sidings;
- There are an estimated 10,000 crossings (including active protection, passive protection, occupational and private crossings);

- Active and passive protection in place at cane rail crossings is identical to that of the Queensland's public railways and in line with the *Queensland Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)*;
- All cane rail crossings (apart from occupational and private crossings) have active or passive protection;
- The 20 mills run in excess of 1000 trains per day;
- The industry experiences few level crossing accidents however the majority of those occur at actively protected crossings.

It is suggested that this industry's experience can be used to make a positive contribution to the Victorian Road Safety Committee inquiry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference seek comment on level crossing safety technology.

The sugar milling companies maintain their rail operations and infrastructure to a high standard of safety and relevant technology within reason. The activities of cane transport operators in constructing and maintaining level crossings are always carried out consistent with the requirements of the regional road authority.

Unfortunately, mills' collective experience is that some public users of the cane railway crossings either don't understand or simply choose to disregard the safety protection in place.

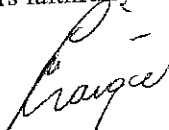
In general the sugar milling industry's experience is that there is no apparent link between level crossing incidents (near misses and accidents) and the amount or sophistication of technology in active protection of its level crossings.

The principal purpose of this submission is to express the industry's belief that there is a strong need to emphasise public safety awareness and to address knowledge about level crossing safety responsibilities in road users and pedestrians.

The industry would also support any revision of penalties intended to promote greater attention to level crossing safety among road users and pedestrians.

The Australian Sugar Milling Council is prepared to assist if the Inquiry needs additional details in the matters it has addressed. Any inquiries may be addressed to Mr Peter Warren at peter.warren@asmc.com.au or on telephone (07) 3231 5002.

Yours faithfully



J M Craigie
General Manager