

# ONLINE ARTICLE

<b>Title:</b>	"Northern cattle trains grind to halt over bridge delays"
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Two of the nation's largest beef processors have joined forces with the Winton Shire Council to challenge the Queensland Government's response over its schedule for repairs to a critically important rail bridge in the state's northwest.

The Darr River rail bridge between Winton and Longreach was knocked out by floods last month, and Queensland Rail has informed stakeholders that repairs will not be effected until the end of July, at earliest.

That five-month timeframe will potentially push tens of thousands of cattle that would otherwise be shipped to coastal Queensland processing plants by rail this year back onto the road system, elevating road traffic, putting more pressure on already pot-holed surfaces, and negatively impacting on transport productivity, bruising and other issues.

A joint statement issued yesterday by Winton Shire Council, JBS Australia and Teys Australia, said livestock rail services out of Winton were at a standstill due to damage to the Darr River bridge on February 22.

Winton mayor Ed Warren said the group was calling on the Queensland Government to re-prioritise repairs to the structure as a matter of urgency for the state's beef industry.

'We have a big investment in this major rail loading facility at Winton, with three trains per week normally moving more than 3000 head per week, or 90,000 head of cattle for 2012, to Rockhampton and southeast Queensland for processing,' he said.

Depending on the season, the Winton-Longreach line carries anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 cattle to market annually, and 2012 being the season it is, it was reasonable to assume that traffic this year would otherwise have been at the upper-end of that scale.

Earlier this year, an agreement was reached between processors and Queensland Rail to increase regular CattleTrain services from two to three each week, from April to October.

“Indications from Queensland Rail are that the bridge won’t be fixed until late July at the earliest – this will have major impact on beef producers and the Winton economy. If they stick to that schedule, the season is all but over,” Mr Warren said.

“If the damage had occurred in southeast Queensland somewhere, QR would have had it fixed in next to no time. This section of the line between Winton and Longreach has been caught up in this QR privatisation push, with savings and maintenance money being taken away from certain parts of the network and put elsewhere, we believe.”

Mr Warren said the Winton rail-head typically serviced an enormous cattle catchment, loading cattle from as far as the Northern Territory, Mt Isa, the Barkly Tableland, the Channel Country and far western Queensland.

The group called on the Government and Queensland Rail to give urgent priority to repairing the bridge and ensuring livestock rail services were restored as soon as possible.

“Beyond that short-term need, we want the Queensland Government to have a good hard look at the future directions for livestock transport by rail. It has a lot of positives: it’s better from the meatworks side because cattle arrive in better condition, with less bruising and better animal welfare outcomes; and it takes a lot of pressure off the already stressed road system.”