



## Competition point angers Wheatbelt farmers

IN the April 7 edition of *Farm Weekly*, Liberal Agricultural MP Brian Ellis was quoted as saying he supported the Pastoralists and Graziers Association's (PGA) new initiative to maintain competition on rail.

But it seems he has upset a number of Wheatbelt growers who have contacted him saying they disagree with his stance.

The PGA's campaign was kick-started in April when previous Western Grains Committee chairman Rick Wilson cited competition on rail as one of the best ways to take trucks off roads while opposing the retention of Tier 3 lines at the same time.

At the PGA's campaign launch Mr Ellis said his philosophy had always revolved around competition because the best result for farmers could be achieved that way.

"I think we only have to look back to the end of the single desk when competition was allowed to affect grain exports," he said at the launch.

"I don't think there could be a farmer to argue things haven't improved, grain prices went up immediately that year and have stayed at a reasonable price because of that competition.

"I know there's a campaign at the moment around Tier 3 rail lines.

"It's just a fact of life the competition for those lines is the movement of grain by trucks.

"I think it would be best for those people campaigning to have money spent on those lines, to fight for a viable option and lobby to have money invested in roads because trucks are going to cart that grain

whether there is money invested in them or not."

Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance chairman and Narembeen grower Bill Cowan reflected grower disenchantment with Mr Ellis' comments saying it sounded as if Mr Ellis was far too "wrapped-up" with the PGA.

"The Watco CBH business study has actually shown that grain on Tier 3s can be transported cheaper with an efficient carrier," Mr Cowan said.

"There are now a number of former PGA members who have been to our meetings who gave up their membership over the debate and have expressed absolute concern over the number of trucks on WA roads.

"Mr Ellis seems to be removed from the real world."

Mr Ellis responded by saying that, as a third generation grain grower with a practical understanding of grain transport issues, he found it difficult to understand Mr Cowan's claim that he 'seems to be removed from the real world'.

"Just like any other farmer, I have to transport my family's grain at a competitive cost and I also have to share the roads with road trains," Mr Ellis said.

"While I consider the views of the PGA, I also value the input of many other organisations and contrary to Bill Cowan's view I am not 'too wrapped up' in the PGA.

"Where grain on rail is not seen as viable, I have made it plain that road funding should be made available to support local governments in providing a safe option and provide farmers with a competitive option."