

Question on Notice

No. 351

Asked on 21 March 2024

MR J LISTER ASKED MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS AND MINISTER FOR DIGITAL SERVICES (HON B MELLISH)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the fire damage which occurred to the Wallangarra railway line during the bushfires which occurred on 31 October 2023—

Will the Minister advise if Commonwealth funding has been sought to assist Queensland in the cost of repairing the railway line damage under the declared disaster of 'Southern Queensland fires: 8 September–7 November 2023', or any other disaster recovery arrangements?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Southern Downs for the question.

Queensland Rail has advised the line experienced significant damage, with four timber bridges destroyed, more than 1000 sleepers requiring replacement, damage to an additional timber bridge, and one road-over-rail bridge located at Bridge Link Drive, Wallangarra.

While the road-over-rail bridge is closed, a detour is in place and Queensland Rail has committed to repairing and reopening this particular road-over-rail bridge at Bridge Link Drive, Wallangarra. Repair works on this bridge are underway with expected completion in April 2024, pending weather and construction conditions. At this time, this bridge is the only repair works being completed on the Wallangarra line.

No Queensland Rail customer or freight services utilise this branch line. Queensland Rail advises that the Wallangarra branch line is used one day a month by the Southern Downs Steam Railway (SDSR) Association for steam train services.

Following the bushfires, Queensland Rail sought recovery funding from the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). The QRA administers Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements (DRFA) on behalf of the Commonwealth and State governments. Queensland Rail was advised by the QRA that they are ineligible for DRFA, including for the repair of the Wallangarra branch line.

Queensland Rail understands the Wallangarra branch line is important to steam train enthusiasts, however work across the network needs to be prioritised to keep freight and people moving throughout the state. As such, the line between Stanthorpe and Wallangarra will remain closed while Queensland Rail continues to investigate options.

Queensland Rail remains committed to working with heritage partners to find alternative routes for their train journeys. I am advised the SDSR Association still runs many other experience services throughout the year from Warwick to Stanthorpe, Clifton, Darling Downs, Wheatvale, Toolburra, Inglewood, Goondiwindi Roma, Dalby, Chinchilla and Toowoomba.

Queensland Rail has also been very supportive of heritage operations throughout the southern and western downs. Queensland Rail has even lent the SDSR Association one of their heritage steam locomotives, for well over 12 months now while its own steam locomotive undergoes major repairs. Queensland Rail has also recently granted the SDSR Association use of the historic Warwick station through a long-term, 'peppercorn' lease.