

**Opinion Piece, by Mark Rodda, CEO FREE Eyre**  
**The Stock Journal**  
**10 August 2015**

**The Eyre Peninsula Grain Grower's Infrastructure Development Fund.**

There is no doubt that the release of the findings of FREE Eyre's survey of Eyre Peninsula grain grower's desire to establish a new grower owned cooperative to investigate and potentially invest in grain related infrastructure has created significant discussion. This engagement by grain growers, grain buyers, representative bodies and government is exactly what is needed.

Over the past three weeks, FREE Eyre has hosted eight public forums across the EP to discuss the background to the issue, the survey methodology, findings and recommendations. (Around 400 farming families completed the original survey, all of which accompanied the recommendations presented to the Agriculture Minister). Collectively, 120 people attended these latest forums to seek further information, express their opinions, views and offer alternative ideas on the original proposals.

For perfectly legitimate personal and historical reasons, there have been arguments aired against the list of recommendations made. The highlighting of these concerns is invaluable, necessary and highly encouraged in developing and refining the concept – we would be foolish to forget the mistakes of the past.

It is incredibly important to note, however, that even those 'against' the findings and recommendations made by FREE Eyre, agree that we must collectively "do something" to maintain and improve the competitiveness of Eyre Peninsula grain farming families in the future. We are almost entirely reliant on export grain markets and currently have no effective stake or influence in critical supply chain infrastructure that ensures the safe and competitive pathway for our grain.

So the question is, what does "do something" look like?

Shared vision and common purpose amongst grain growers is essential. Sure, the creation of a grower owned vehicle to take control and increase competition by investing in exporting and value adding infrastructure may not benefit every contributing grain grower equally on day one. I suspect, however, that our former SACBH network took time to build to the point of mutual benefit of all grower members.

Our feedback correctly suggests that EP grain growers want to have input into and understand the options and the master plan for the most competitive grain handling, exporting and value-adding infrastructure for the future. No plan currently exists. We can wait and hope that someone else will do this for us, or we can have the steely determination and drive to make it happen. If we have this conviction, there is no

doubt that we will need funds to engage industry stakeholders to co-invest in the journey.

The recommendation to create the *Eyre Peninsula Grain Grower's Infrastructure Development Fund* is ultimately about establishing an independent grower owned and controlled vehicle that represents the desires and ambitions of all Eyre Peninsula grain growers to take control of their future competitiveness.

Of course, the application of a levy on grain sales to establish such a Fund is critically important and every grain growing family will have a different view on this, based upon their personal circumstances. Nonetheless, I believe that the very establishment of a grower owned and controlled Infrastructure Fund – irrespective of the dollars/ton collected - will have enormous future benefits for all Eyre Peninsula grain growers.

To that end, FREE Eyre will continue to engage with grain growers and industry stakeholders to further refine its recommendations and actively encourages all ideas to be raised. As history clearly demonstrates, if we do nothing new we will receive nothing new.