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# Need to build rail resilience for the Illawarra

**T**HE term "supply chain" has become ingrained in our vocabulary due to the COVID-19 pandemic - and for good reason. Supply chains are key to economy-wide productivity and competitiveness.

The role of ports, road and rail port connections and rail intermodal hubs in facilitating supply chains cannot be underestimated.

NSW Ports' assets at Port Kembla and Port Botany contribute \$13.6 billion annually to NSW's Gross State Product and support around 65,000 jobs. They connect industries, businesses and consumers domestically and globally.

To ensure our supply chains are prepared for the state's future population and trade needs, long-term land use and infrastructure planning and targeted investment in infrastructure connectivity for freight supply chains is imperative.

This need has been highlighted by recent storm events. The vulnerable Moss Vale-Uanderra rail line, which connects NSW regional exports with the international trade gateway of Port Kembla, remains closed for repairs due to major land slippage and is expected to be unusable for six months in total - that's half a year.

This is impacting hundreds of train services every month, forcing the delay or

diversion of valuable regional exports such as grain, coal and copper concentrate and impacting farmers from making the most of recent record harvests.

The importance of rail connectivity with the Illawarra will only grow as Port Kembla becomes the state's second container terminal, in line with NSW Government policy.

Infrastructure NSW's recently released State Infrastructure Strategy recommends transport network planning be undertaken to support road and rail links from Port Kembla to major logistics hubs in Western Sydney.

One strong proposal is the South West Illawarra Rail Link (or SWIRL), a dual

freight-passenger line along the existing Maldon-Dombarton rail corridor, connecting Port Kembla to the Western Sydney Aerotropolis and beyond.

A study by University of Wollongong's SMART Infrastructure Facility found that SWIRL offers the most cost-effective solution to connectivity challenges. The potential benefits go well beyond freight transport.

Planning and delivering improved rail connectivity to Port Kembla, which is efficient and reliable, will be essential to grow our economy, enhance productivity and improve living standards.

■ Marika Calfas is NSW Ports Chief Executive Officer