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**We'll miss the boat
Deepen Outer Harbour or lose trade warning**

CONTAINER ships will bypass Adelaide for Melbourne unless immediate action is taken to deepen Outer Harbor, supporters of the plan warn.

Flinders Ports and the SA Farmers Federation have called on the State Government to act immediately to deepen the channel so the new generation of larger ships can reach the port.

The Victorian Government has commissioned a \$15 million environmental impact study as a prelude to a \$450 million plan to deepen the Port Melbourne channel. There are fears this will see large ships bypass Adelaide, forcing local businesses to freight goods to Melbourne for export.

The State Government is committed to the Outer Harbour project, but still is assessing how much to contribute to the \$50 million cost.

Flinders Ports chief executive Vincent Tremaine said the delay could prove costly.

“The benefits to the state of deepening the channel stand at somewhere between \$500 million and \$1.9 billion if you take into account the flow-on impact,” he said.

“We are putting in \$20 million towards it and we need the government to act.

“The larger ships are now here but they can't get into Outer Harbor if they are full or don't have the right tides.

“They are on tight schedules and won't wait for tides - they will just skip Adelaide.

“If Melbourne deepens and we don't they will go to Melbourne and we will end up with no container trade.”

The plan to deepen the channel from its current depth of 12.2m to 14.2m is part of a \$300 million plan to upgrade infrastructure in Port Adelaide but it did not receive any funding in the State Budget. A spokesman for Treasurer Kevin Foley said a decision on funding was expected within a few months.

“There is still some number crunching being done, then there will be commercial negotiations,” he said.

“The government is committed to the project.”

SA Farmers Federation president John Lush said delays could see the container trade shift to Melbourne regardless of whether Outer Harbor is deepened.

“This is probably the most important infrastructure requirement for the SA rural industry,” he said.

“This is a window of opportunity we must grasp, or we may literally miss the boat.”