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### **Deepen harbour or lose business**

Pressure is mounting on the State Government to commit funds to deepen the harbour at Port Adelaide.

Farmers, shipping companies and Flinders Ports are worried the Port of Melbourne will take business away from Port Adelaide.

The Victorian Government has announced it is fast-tracking plans to deepen Melbourne harbour, making it more accessible to bigger container ships. The \$400 million plan is aimed at maintaining Melbourne's position as the nation's busiest port, handling 40 per cent of container cargo.

Premier Mike Rann announced in March a \$55 million plan to deepen Outer Harbour from 12.2m to 14.2m to allow access for huge grain freighters known as Panamax ships.

Flinders Ports chief executive Vincent Tremaine briefed the ALP Caucus last week on the urgency of the dredging.

He told The Advertiser yesterday he was concerned at the speed with which Melbourne was pushing ahead.

``If they beat us to it, we may see the loss of services to Melbourne. We are still waiting to see whether the Government here is going to be prepared to provide some funding," he said. ``The total cost is about \$55 million compared to \$500 million in Melbourne.

``We can put up \$20 million and we cannot afford to put in any more than that."

Mr Tremaine said deepening the harbour could provide up to \$500 million in direct benefits to the state over 20 years and \$1.9 billion in benefits, including employment.

A spokesman for Infrastructure Minister Patrick Conlon said an environmental impact statement and a business case study were due this month.

After that, a decision on what was ``a priority project for SA" would be made with work likely to start early next year. SA Farmers Federation president John Lush said some ships were already bypassing the port of Adelaide.