



**RTSZero**

## Is 2021 shaping up as a pivotal year for level crossing safety in NSW?

New, powerful voices have begun making themselves heard in raising awareness of issues surrounding level crossings and how to make them safer for everyone.

They are Maddie Bott and the members of the Country Women's Association NSW.

Let's start with Maddie's story.

On 23 February 2021, Ethan Hunter and Mark Fenton were killed when their B-double was hit by a freight train at a passive level crossing at Bribbaree, about 70km north-west of Young, New South Wales.

Since the crash, Ethan's fiancé - Maddie Bott – has been fighting to ensure no-one else experiences the unthinkable.

The crash followed another incident, also near Bribbaree, just 12 months earlier when a truck collided with a train on Mary Gilmour Way, northwest of the small village at around 7am on 18 February 2020.

Ms Bott's arguments for everyone to be more vigilant around level crossings are spot on.

In media interviews she acknowledged everyone in NSW had a reason to join her fight whether they lived near a level crossing, will ever use one, has a loved one who is in our emergency services, or is a first responder themselves – we all have a role to play in protecting people.

She has also acknowledged the ongoing echoes of level crossing crashes experienced by train drivers and crews. Ms Bott's petition to State Government calling for level crossing safety reform amassed 21,011 signatures.

At their annual conference, members of the NSW Country Women's Association joined Ms Bott's fight by advocating for level crossing improvements.

Their website lists these as some of the NSW Branch's current issues –

- \* Request the NSW government act urgently and commit immediately to increasing the safety measures in place across all level crossings in NSW, so that wherever possible and practicable, all public level crossings are equipped with warning lights as a minimum safety feature.

- \* Advocate for increased safety measures being implemented across the private crossing network in NSW.



The NSW Government announced speed limits for drivers approaching 13 level crossings on the state and local road network in regional areas had been reduced. This is a part of an ongoing state-wide program to improve safety at level crossings.

Reducing speed limits and other safety measures are steps in the right direction.

We agree with Ms Bott. Every one of us at some point, regardless of where in the world we are will have to negotiate a level crossing.

While boom gates, flashing lights, lower speed limits and other safety measures are all helpful the greatest weapon we have at our disposal when it comes to improving safety at level crossings is ourselves.

We are the ones in control of the vehicle and how fast it might be travelling. When we are approaching a level crossing our first thoughts should be of preparing to stop regardless of if we can see or hear a train.

To Ms Bott and the NSW Branch of the CWA – we would like to tweak a little something from that legendary movie Casablanca.

“Welcome to the fight. This time we know rail safety will win.”

*RTS Zero is the partnership of Michael Timms and Sonia Roberts who have a combined 55 years of experience in road safety. Their profiles are searchable on LinkedIn. This work is their personal analysis of current events.*