



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



Positive But Wary Outlook from Ports Australia

Ports Australia communications director Josh Appleton is upbeat as to how Australia overall and particularly the maritime transport industry has and is addressing the COVID-19 situation – but equally, urges that no complacency now develops.

Stakeholders have drawn together positively to deal with the many challenges presented by the pandemic and consequent containment measures, observes Mr Appleton.

“We haven’t seen any major disruption at the port gates – we haven’t seen a port be closed down due to an outbreak,” he told *Semaphore*.

“I think that is a really good, positive to draw on.

“In terms of trade, it is obvious that something like this is going to have an effect. But all in all, trade has kept moving in and out.

“Anecdotally, exports are going well, which is very important – our economy is very much built on what we export. If our resources stopped being exported, we’d be in a lot of trouble.”

Among several recent priority issues for Ports Australia has been a call for transparency around COVID-19 measures being enforced by all levels of government throughout Australia.

Although Mr Appleton says the Government itself has not acted on a specific request to produce a routinely-updated summary document, he notes that industry leaders have themselves “stepped up” and been proactive in this space.

Mr Appleton positively observes the Government has sought to take a national approach in its response – to get “good consistency across the board” – while equally recognising that the different states and territories have their own unique risks to address.

In regard to the potential development of a “trans-Tasman bubble” – which has gained new momentum as *Semaphore* prepared to publish – he notes this could prove particularly relevant to the number of New Zealanders who travel to work in Australia’s oil and gas sector.

“Because of the restrictions with people travelling into the country that are now in place, if someone from New Zealand needs to travel over to Western Australia they would probably have to fly into Sydney due to the lack of flights and then transfer over.

Key Focuses

Recent key public focuses of Ports Australia – whose members are either Australian ports or organisations involved in providing services to the sector – have included:

- call for transparency over measures being enforced by all levels of Government through a routinely-updated summary document
- need for ports and their personnel to be recognised as essential services
- self-isolation practices developed in liaison with regulators and stakeholders
- measures to “keep COVID-19 out” developed in liaison with regulators and stakeholders
- ensuring the safety of maritime staff around the country

“Depending on the travel restrictions and quarantine measures in each state, they could end up doing multiple stints of mandatory self-isolation, whether that be at a hotel or when they arrive at their destination or when they arrive on their ship. It is not a very practical way of doing things, given they need to get to work.

“This is why the states and territories are now working towards aligning with a national approach which provides exemptions for maritime crew moving around Australia.”

Noting the general momentum building towards the easing of containment measures within the country, Mr Appleton nonetheless emphasises the need to remain vigilant.

“It’s not like we are now going easy, slowing down or being complacent. Whatever happens from here needs to be exactly the same as what we have been trying to achieve for the past three or four months, which is addressing the risk that COVID-19 presents at that place and time, and going forward from there.

“Whether restrictions are eased or lifted, I think they just have to be appropriate to address whatever risk is at play. If the risk is being addressed and we’re keeping our port staff safe, then I think that’s all we can really do.”



Ports Australia communications director Josh Appleton

May 2020

