Looking to the future at Flinders Port

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As the global pandemic continued through 2021, the story from a port perspective remained largely unchanged. Ports have stayed open and fully operational, though concerns remain about bottlenecks linked to container and shipping capacity. For ports, however, the continuity delivered over the last two years is testament to the resilience of our sector, and the approach to COVID management, not least from ports here in Australia.

As we tentatively step into the 'COVID normal' world, attention is now turning to calibrating port and shipping operations with the evolving mandates linked to worker vaccination and the opportunity to further ease COVID restrictions across port and shipping infrastructure. This will be an ongoing challenge, at least for the next year, and I would like to thank our employees. They have gone above and beyond over the last two years, ensuring ports continue to operate efficiently.

Port Adelaide

At the Flinders Adelaide Container Terminal (FACT), 2021 was an exciting year as we shifted our focus from physical to digital infrastructure development. Having completed the $80 million channel widening project in late 2019, enabling us to welcome Post-Panamax ships, we are now piloting cutting-edge AI technology to optimise container movements through the terminal itself. Given the increase in container volumes projected at FACT, utilising intuitive technology to support decision making around critical issues such as the holding and movement of containers is fundamental to our business. Progress on this front increased significantly in 2021, while we also continue to explore other Smart Port innovations.

Regional Ports

Across the seven ports we operate, throughput increased by 7.7% to 23.2m tonnes in the financial year ending in June 2021. Projections indicate that this growth will be sustained through the next year, and the investments we have made in port infrastructure will enable us to handle this growing trade in our state. A case in point is our investment into Klein Point over the last year where we have spent over $5million on refurbishment and maintenance activities to maintain an industry leading level of service at the Jetty for a further 10 to 15 years, and to ensure ongoing safety and reliability of the existing infrastructure and related operations. The investment once again shows our commitment to ensuring all of South Australia's ports can continue to facilitate crucial regional trade.

Planning for the future

2021 also marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of our business. Founded in 2001, we have since invested over a quarter of a billion dollars in strengthening infrastructure and ensuring our ports are fit for purpose. We have also successfully built out from our core ports business to provide integrated supply chain solutions through Flinders Logistics and Flinders Warehousing and Distribution. Today we facilitate over $25 billion in international trade annually and employ over 700 people and indirectly support 6000.

From this foundation we are now looking forward to the coming 50 years with the imminent publication of our masterplan. Given our footprint across South Australia, we have an acute understanding of the role we play in facilitating freight in and out of the state. The masterplan will enable us to collaborate with other major stakeholders and the state government to ensure we can future-proof our economy against the changing dynamics of port infrastructure.

One of the factors that will almost certainly impact that dynamic will be climate change. Through our masterplan, which is aligned with our sustainability plan, we are already working towards addressing the challenges we may face as a result of our changing climate while also reducing our own impact on the environment itself. Indeed, at the end of 2021, we also formally acknowledged this new reality with our company Climate Change statement which puts on record the goals, commitments, and action outlined in the FPH sustainability plan.

This focus on sustainability is mirrored across our customer base as actors at all stages of the supply chain continue to decarbonise their operations. For ports and shipping companies this issue will become increasingly important as companies further up the supply chain begin to report on and reduce their emissions. It is our job to help be part of that solution. For us, addressing innovation and sustainability challenges such as this are a fundamental part of our business.

We can see the light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to the pandemic. Now is the time to ensure the industry refocuses on the digital and physical infrastructure needed to ensure we emerge out of that tunnel prepared for another fifty years.