

Port of Melbourne



*Pictured: the Port of Melbourne on the Yarra River.
Photo credit: Port of Melbourne.*



Never waste a crisis, nor forget who you serve

By KEITH GORDON,
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It's been interesting to observe how COVID-19 has accelerated innovation in certain industries and expedited new ways of working in others, courtesy of necessity and shifting consumer behaviours.

Locked-in Victorian homebuyers, for example, embraced a shift to online auctions this year, allowing the property sector to maintain a satisfactory number of transactions. Those same people have most likely forgone their winter holidays and instead started 'nesting', ordering home-improvement items and work-from-home technology products that have triggered a seemingly endless cavalcade of delivery trucks that roll down their streets.

It's these, and a raft of other COVID-influenced consumer habits, which have had a considerable impact on shipping movements through major global routes – including in our part of the world.

As a result, larger vessels with 8,000-

10,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) on board (up from 4,000-6000 TEU in previous years) are carrying the ever-increasing number of products bound for Australian homes and businesses. The fate of older ships is demolition – typically within ten years.

Shipping line operators are capitalising on this new market dynamic, transitioning quickly to larger vessels in order to find increased efficiencies of scale.

For the Port of Melbourne (PoM), the rise in the number of larger vessels entering Australia's largest container port serves as affirmation for the range of investments and improvements made over recent years, including:

- dredging of parts of the port's shipping channels;
- enabling additional safe vessel manoeuvrability around the port;
- capital expenditure on a range of projects – 150 tonne bollards at Swanson Dock, for example;

- preliminary dredging and preparation works in preparation for the reinstatement works of Berths 4 and 5 at Webb Dock East; and
- extensive simulations of vessels up to 350 metres in length, and with beams ranging between 42-48 metres.

More to do

While these initiatives mean that the port can better cater for larger vessels today, and into the future, the task of asset capacity planning and management is never complete.

Over the past 12 months, considerable preparation has gone into the next phase of investment at the port. While Swanson Dock East remediation works (Berths 1 and 2) have now been completed and preliminary designs for the full remediation of Swanson Dock West (Berths 1 to 3) are done, this significant project is likely to take at least four years to complete.

The commencement of the reinstatement works at Webb Dock East Berths 4 and 5 will provide 71 metres of additional quayline, allowing the Victorian International Container Terminal to return to its intended two-berth design and capacity for (circa) 1.2 million TEUs annually.

The deepening of the Gellibrand turning basin (levelling at 15.5 metres) ensures the risk profile for Suezmax class tankers has been minimised when navigating the basin and also positions the port to safely handle LR2 tankers, which may visit in the not-too-distant future.

With all of these upgrades, safety has always been a priority. Working hand in glove with the Port of Melbourne Harbour Master, Melbourne Vessel Traffic Service (VTS), Marine Safety Victoria and our various stakeholders, we have put first the processes and systems that enable safe navigation into the port, as they

cater for the changing demands from an increasing number of large ships.

Working to a new post-pandemic pace

It's been well documented during COVID-19 that operational agility was a determining factor to organisations that either struggled or thrived.

In the port industry's freight challenge, it has shown how the sector can innovate, while also shining a light on some long standing issues, with considerable market commentary focused on shipping bottlenecks and land-side logistics shortfalls.

Post-pandemic, the shipping industry should be expecting a more rapid evolution of technology, and deeper investment in automation than previous pathways promised.

New electronic systems continue to create a step-change in container

terminal, ship handling technology and overall freight management systems. Much of this change appears transformative and may well be comparable to aviation's revolution a few decades ago.

If nothing else, the COVID-19 crisis has helped to sharpen the focus and operations of Australia's supply chain, making it better-equipped to manage the inevitable challenges that confront a sector which relies on efficiency through every part of the process.

This will be welcome news for those aforementioned consumers and business owners who will continue to demand and consume items in high numbers.

And it's a reminder for PoM – and our stakeholders – that our ability to manage the flow of more than one-third of Australia's container trade is a key enabler for the state and nation's social and economic wellbeing. ▲

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