



Pictured: dusk falls over the Hunter River in Newcastle, NSW. The Hunter River is an important waterway for the export of Australian commodities. The large building in the background is GrainCorp's Carrington Terminal. Photo credit: Gilly Tanabose via Unsplash.

construction, and we saw that through Maritime Union of Australia's national industrial action against DP World.

The waterfront workplace should be an important focus as we try to make Australia more productive.

Productivity growth has been one of the primary drivers of increasing living standards - the more goods and services a society can produce with a given set of inputs, the greater its material standard of living.

Almost all of Australia's long term wage increases have happened because of increased productivity⁴, so there should be a bipartisan approach to do anything we can to lift productivity standards for Australians.

The Coalition in government was focused on freight and supply chains, particularly in response to the COVID pandemic and the stresses that put on moving goods, particularly between states with different lockdown regimes, with the end user or consumer paying the price.

The pandemic, as well as extreme weather events and skills shortages, gave policymakers a deeper understanding of the complexities and vulnerabilities in our supply chains and saw the launch of the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy.

Reviewed last year (2023), this strategy brought together all tiers of government

and industry to address our freight challenges, build resilience in the supply chain, and make this nation more competitive.

Given the fact that two thirds of the population live in the five large Australian port cities, it is important for us to also think about the impact this has on local communities, their economies and on workers.

For example, the Port of Newcastle is estimated⁵ to pump almost \$1 billion into the local economy and generate almost 6,000 jobs in the Hunter.

The shipping industry ranges across a broad range of areas – from fleet management to conference services, stevedores, cargo handling equipment, operators, managers and agents and in Australia that includes 50,000 jobs.

One of the recommendations is to look at more data in the sector and nothing will inform and support decisions better than data and evidence.

The Australian Sea Freight report, according to the Department of Infrastructure's web site, was last updated with a 2020-21 report⁶. We need better reporting, because that's the only thing that will reinforce the need for change.

A task force on establishing a government-supported maritime fleet in November provided⁷ 16 recommendations. The Government

agreed to 12 of them in full or in principle, while committing to continue exploring the remaining four.

We will work with the government on measures that will support our industry, which employs 50,000 people, that is fiscally responsible, that is a strategic national investment and offers benefits to the community more largely.

We agree that shipping is important for Australia to remain globally competitive, to support our exporters and ensure goods are delivered to Australian consumers in an effective and sustainable way.

We need to make sure coastal environments are protected, that the workforce is supported properly and that their workplace is safe.

We need to have a sector that is regulated fairly, but any added complexity will be bad for consumers and will put our exporters behind.

We cannot harm Australia's reputation as a safe and reliable source of goods, and we must ensure our exporting and importing sectors aren't tied up in red tape and complexity.

We are willing to work to this common goal for the benefit of exporters, tourism operators, Australian consumers and the broader Australian economy. ▲

¹ Australian Sea Freight 2020-2021, BITRE, <https://www.bitre.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Australian%20Sea%20Freight%202020-21.pdf>.

² <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/66e3aa5c3be4647add01845ce353992-0190062022/original/Container-Port-Performance-Index-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/industrial-disputes-australia/latest-release>

⁴ <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/productivity-insights/long-term/productivity-insights-2020-long-term.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.portofnewcastle.com.au/news/report-shows-port-of-newcastle-an-economic-powerhouse-for-nsw-and-australia/>

⁶ https://www.bitre.gov.au/statistics/maritime/australian_sea_freight

⁷ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australian-government-response-to-the-strategic-fleet-taskforce-final-report.pdf>