

Victoria

By CHARLES MASTERS,
Secretary, Shipping Australia's Victoria Committee

The Victoria committee met throughout the year and covered a wide range of issues. The year started with the consequences of a prolonged dispute, which began 4Q 2023, between DP World and the Maritime Union. It appeared to be supported by the relevant State Minister who failed to apply a voluntary code of practice to manage significant disruptions.

Congestion at the roro terminals was problematic with quarantine inspections hindering the clearance of vehicles. As the year unfolded, frustration played out with the local transport operators' inability to handle the demand. Two operators exist in the sector, publicly-listed QUBE and Wallenius Wilhelmsen-operated MIRRAT. QUBE meantime have made a \$300m takeover bid for MIRRAT subject to ACCC approval. While this means this activity will likely be a monopoly it is interesting to note that, as we write, discussions around the banning of noncompete clauses are outlawed.

Staying on the topic of RoRos, the question asked of Ports Victoria was: if a vessel loaded with electric vehicles reports a fire en-route to Melbourne, would it be allowed entry? Given what we witnessed elsewhere, and the fact some Scandinavian ferry operators reportedly refuse to load EVs, it would be prudent to know expectations ahead of time. We cannot imagine a vessel that could potentially pollute both air and water being allowed to enter Port Phillip. Ports Victoria advised they are consulting with the relevant authorities to determine if protocols should be in place.

The port pilots reported an increasing number of vessels incurring mechanical failures when underway in the port, thought to be as many as one per fortnight. These are reported into Australian Maritime Safety Authority who then visit vessel, investigate, and report. It is felt many vessel operators

are switching vessels from secondary jurisdictions where the monitoring and reporting between authorities is not as stringent. We remind those operators deploying vessels into the Australian trade to be mindful that if is not up to standard then it could be detained.

After a decade as Victorian Treasurer, Tim Pallas presided over an era in which the State Government coffers are empty, and the state has slipped to become the third poorest in the country. Productivity is reported to be 13% below the national average! Despite the sad state of affairs, Freight Victoria circulated a paper seeking input to assist with projected population growth out to 2050. Infrastructure Victoria are also acting as if everything is normal and seeking input. Seems the public service is going through the motions, unable to deliver much without the state's finances being repaired. This brings us to the point of despair when we are asked for input, yet projects discussed some seven years ago remain incomplete. Yes, we discuss the elusive rail connection to Webb Dock where all import containers are taxed \$10 to fund the \$300 million rail facility at Swanson Dock. The purpose was to reduce heavy vehicle traffic away from the port precinct yet, as each year passes, vessel sizes increase, and percentage of imports increase over Webb Dock as opposed to Swanson Dock.

On a positive note, the implementation of financial penalties for mis-declared container weights has seen improvements to safety at sea and on land. The terminal at Webb Dock, with latest technology, has been providing the committee with data over past years which grappled with how to best address the issue. It followed on from two vessels en-route from Asian ports to Australia encountering bad weather along the NSW coast with outboard deck stacks collapsing and containers lost overboard. We have not seen a report following an

investigation, which we await.

Outgoing State Chair, James Kurz State Chair vacated his seat at the 4Q 24 AGM and handed over the role to deputy Chair Olga Coelho Huebert, Chief Commercial Officer at VICT. Olga will be supported by Sirisha Gunde (Line Manager, Hoegh Autoliners) as Deputy Chair. James contributed massively to the Committees activity over the past seven years which included a short period as Deputy Chair. On behalf of all who have attended the quarterly meetings and associated events we extend our sincere thanks to James and wish him well as he devotes his energies into shipping and family life. We also very much look forward to Olga's elevation to Chair and her appointed deputy Ms Sirisha Gunde and wish every success to both new appointees. ▲

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