



# Shipping Australia CEO's Review of 2025

By Captain MELWYN NORONHA

2025 started with a disaster. Communities in northern Queensland were cut-off by floodwaters. Land-based supply routes were cut. It was an emergency. Shipping Australia participated in several of the crisis management meetings.

Heavy freight trucks were marooned on 'islands' cut off by the floods and by damaged infrastructure. There was further delay as bridges had to be inspected for damage.

But why were so many trucks en-route north? To deliver freight, obviously. But why so many? There are deep ports in northern Queensland, there are many cargo ships sailing around Australia, and ocean shipping is cheap and green. So why wasn't Australian cargo from the south being transported to the north by ship? You know why.

It's yet another strike against national coastal trading policy as Australia is more vulnerable to the aftermath of disasters that it would otherwise be.

And now the Maritime Single Window. This was meant to be a thing in force in Australia as of January 1, 2024. One year later, in 2025, it was neither in force nor a thing. Today, it's still not in force, nor a thing. And that's a bad thing.

Too much port call bureaucracy wastes time, effort, and money because there are 6,200 ships or so ships repeatedly doing the same or similar paperwork for 31,000 or so port calls. Those unnecessary costs harm Australian national wellbeing.

It's long past due for this public policy to be implemented, which, not-so-incidentally, relates to the IMO's theme this

year and next. The IMO is campaigning on "putting maritime policy into practice". While it's an initiative to be applauded, it's sad that it has to be an initiative.

Staying on the bureaucratic front, two of Shipping Australia's interventions were particularly noteworthy. Officials attempted to impose two potentially ruinous policies on the grounds of safety. We were pleased to be able to work with the appropriate officials to overturn these policies. A quick shout out of thanks must go to one of the senior officials in the Department of Agriculture and another to the Office of Supply Chain Resilience.

One policy was that officials would board and work on ships up to 10:00 am, so as to avoid the heat. The Dept of Agriculture has training and policies for working in heat so this deadline was expensive, disruptive, unnecessary, and contrary to policy. It was canned quickly and easily.

The second policy was that officials couldn't use ladders on car carriers to get from deck-to-deck because of the risk of falls. It would have been disastrous for Australia if that policy had persisted. It could have shut down the Australian automotive sector. We spent some time researching the issue and carrying out a risk assessment. It was easy enough demonstrate risk mitigation through encouraging the use of cost-effective harnesses that officials could use to clip themselves onto ladders.

Look, anyone who knows me knows that safety is a mantra. But there comes a point, which is most reached when fundamentally safe systems are pushed aside for some highly-theoretical and non-plausible risk. Mitigate the risk. Adapt. Consult.

Which leads onto the next concerning issue: a lack of genuine consultation.

Notification is not consultation. Throughout the year various officials declared: "We're going to do this or that", or, worse, "you're going to pay for this".

That's notification, not consultation. And it's not right. In Australia, stakeholders get to have input into government rule-making. Somehow, somewhere, that principle has been forgotten. Or, worse, it's being disregarded.

In 2024, Ports Victoria notified industry that more tugs had to be made available at Melbourne, a view NOT shared by the tug companies. A requirement to have excessive capacity has been imposed on industry which is being forced to pay for it. Australian competitiveness and productivity has been hindered.

There were a lot of imposed price hikes last year.

Ports and terminals notified customers that they would have to pay more. Fremantle Ports, for example, declared a 295% increase in mooring costs, and 20%-42% increases on box handling. Fremantle argued that previous years had below-inflation increases. Technically correct. But when annual price rises are about 2.5%, and inflation over the period is about 3.6%, it hardly justifies a 295% price hike.

Ports Victoria demanded monies – without consultation – by establishing a new "Navigation and Port Services Fee" to be imposed from, well, now. Members were not consulted – they were notified – and they advised they had no opportunity for significant input. It

appears that fees were imposed without regard to the 2025 Victorian Guide to Regulation. We put this, and other, questions to Ports Victoria which has refused to cooperate. We will continue to advocate in this area.

Moving on, terminal operator DP World's rail expansion is great landside project and we congratulate them. As this is not a marine project, it will not improve port productivity.

On that point, Australian ports are two-way gateways to the Australian market / the rest of the world. They are essential to the wellbeing and prosperity of Australia. But they're not performing well enough. The World Bank has proven that our ports are underperforming. We discuss that problem in detail from page 78.

The upcoming Senate Committee inquiry into productivity in Australia might help, but we probably need a full inquiry on port performance. Good oversight and single governance – these are the missing public policies. Australian seaports are regulated on a State / Territory basis but it would be best if the Commonwealth were to regulate the sector – including pricing and performance – directly.

The issue of theft of seafarers' wages arose in 2025. It violates the fundamental bargain of wages for work. Australia fully supports efforts to tackle wage theft; it is wrong and it must stop.

The ACCC's container stevedoring monitoring report was interesting reading. We note the comments about stevedoring productivity and terminal access charges. Shipping Australia has repeatedly advocated to industry, to

regulators, and to Ministerial Offices that landside terminal access charges are literally not the ocean shipping industry's business. There is, and should be, a clear delineation between landside and marine-side business.

On the positive side, the Secretariat strengthened Shipping Australia through entering into informal associations with several other, respected industry bodies, both here and abroad. We also took part in a range of industry-relevant reviews, such as the Government Roundtables on Productivity, and the National Plan for Maritime Emergencies, among others.

Shipping Australia also progressed its project to develop easy-to-follow compliance guidance for Marine Order 32 (cargo handling equipment). That will help ship crews to improve their compliance and to save operators time and money.

We held many successful events across the year! The Queensland Gala Ball, the NSW Christmas Luncheon, and the Victorian Christmas Luncheon were all incredible hits! A massive THANK YOU to all of our sponsors, organisers, and guests, each of whom made every one of our events so special.

We look forward to the opportunity to continue to work with government and industry to promote and develop the shipping sector. An efficient, productive, and profitable industry boosts the welfare of the ordinary, everyday, Australians and their families. That is what is important and that is what we will continue to do. We will look forward to working with you in the upcoming year. ▲

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## State committees

### New South Wales State Committee

Chairs: Bill Rizzi and Mario Fernando  
Secretary: Melwyn Noronha

### Queensland State Committee

Chair: Ajaz Mir  
Secretary: Geoff Dalgliesh

### South Australia State Committee

Chair: Paul Paparella  
Secretary: Melwyn Noronha

### Victoria State Committee

Chair: Sirisha Gunde  
Secretary: Charles Masters

### Western Australia State Committee

Chair: Kristy Craker  
Secretary: Melwyn Noronha