



Foreword

By Senator the Hon. BRIDGET MCKENZIE,
Senator for Victoria

As a new year dawns and Canberra policy makers return to their desks, they should resolve to working with our maritime industry on putting into practice good maritime policies.

Shipping Australia Limited has provided strong leadership in recommending policies to Government that would improve national prosperity by improving productivity and cutting red tape at our ports.

While 2025 was a year of missed opportunity, with the Federal Government's maritime policy stalled and seemingly lost in a fog, we must all work together to drive policy progress in 2026.

The Coalition will work with Shipping Australia Limited and its members to throw the spotlight on policy failings and on much needed reforms to strengthen the industry.

This work will start immediately with the Coalition having established a formal Senate Inquiry into Productivity in Australia which will include a focus on freight and maritime.

Despite the indispensable role shipping plays in Australia's success, nothing came out of the Government's 'productivity roundtable' process for the industry. We will seek to address this.

In 2023-24 the industry enabled \$467 billion worth of maritime exports and imports worth \$337 billion.

Australian families and businesses relied on almost 6,200 different ships stopping 30,850 times at Australian ports that same year. This includes 16,840 trips direct to Australia from foreign ports.

As a vast island continent, we have always relied on maritime shipping as the backbone of our trade.

From the arrival of the first fleet, Australia's unique geographic position, surrounded by vast oceans and isolated from other continents, has necessitated a reliance on shipping as the primary means of international engagement and economic connectivity.

The Coalition has always been steadfast in its support for maritime shipping as a critical driver of our national economy.

There are issues the Government could move quickly on to support the industry.

The process to establish a Single Maritime Window needs to be re-energised. Commenced by the Coalition when in office and agreed as a global priority by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the single window would create a single portal for information needed by all government agencies.

This would save time and money, cut duplication of effort, reduce data entry errors and speed up approvals. It is a reform to slash the 35,000 hours of shipping time currently dedicated to bureaucratic reporting each year.

This process was intended to be operational by 2024, but has stalled, and must be re-invigorated in 2026.

Also stalled have been the government's promises to establish a pilot 'strategic' fleet of three vessels.

Out of a global commercial fleet of 6,200 vessels (including 136 Australian vessels), 'Albo's armada' of three vessels will barely make a ripple of difference when it comes to ensuring the country's coastal supply chains.

However, the high but undisclosed cost of this flawed policy comes at the expense of implementing actual reforms to improve shipping productivity and secure commercial supply chains.

It is now more than a year since the strategic fleet tender closed with no contracts announced. It is not too late to quietly walk away from this policy misadventure and focus on higher priority reforms.

Labor's planned changes to coastal trading laws must be released. Their current legislation has failed to encourage additional Australian flagged vessels, but imposes severe cabotage restrictions on the sector limiting the ability to maximise efficient use of shipping assets sailing around our continent.

As a trading nation, it is vital Australia critically examines any global proposals to add unnecessary costs to shipping. The proposed IMO Net Zero Framework would inflict a carbon tax penalty of up to US\$480 per tonne CO₂-eq on shipping emissions. The Government has failed to release how much this measure would cost Australia's farmers and exporting industries, nor the cost added to imported goods households and businesses need. Australia should not adopt global net zero policies out of Europe which will damage our economy, and harm shipping.

By working with industry via our Senate Productivity inquiry, in 2026 the Coalition can help drive actual outcomes on beneficial policies and work to prevent measures to further burden the sector. ▲