

Sustainability agenda must remain a focus for ports

Jason Sprott writes the first in a series of features showcasing practical examples of sustainability at work in the face of COVID-19

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 HAS BEEN

nothing short of devastating. Globally, 28 million people have tested positive (to date), with this number expected to rise significantly in coming months. In early September, India was recording over 90,000 new cases per day.

Sadly, reported global fatalities are around one million and rising.

In Australia, we have lost more than 800 people. In the first '100 days' of the pandemic, we lost around 100 people. So far in the second '100 days', we have lost more than 700.

Our mental and physical health has been affected, our work patterns have changed and our behavior as a society has been tested. The economic consequences have been dramatic and will be felt for many years.

In many ways, time has stopped. We have been subject to statistical saturation, have become tied to short term, ever-repeating news cycles, and in many ways are struggling in determining any sort of clarity beyond the next few months.

THE WAY FORWARD

The importance of partnerships and our deep human need for connection will be central to our recovery - as a nation and as a global community. We must help each other, both professionally and personally.

We must continue to ensure that we work together and in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #17. Strong, meaningful and collaborative partnerships will help see us through these times.

Successful emergence from COVID-19 will require "all hands on deck".

Now more than ever, we need to ensure that our people are safe, our community is protected and that we refresh our business continuity, resilience and adaptation strategies. The ability to pivot, explore and take advantage of new collaborative business opportunities will be critical.

TAKING POSITIVE ACTION

What effect the pandemic has on global sustainability in the long term is ultimately up to us. We must not allow COVID-19 to erode our commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Framework. And, we must not allow the pandemic to "white ant" our significant achievements in working towards a sustainable and resilient future.

It is our view that having a robust sustainability strategy can help ensure appropriate organisational response to COVID-19 - a holistic strategy based around four main themes: people, environment, business prosperity and partnerships. Importantly, the strategy must involve internal and external engagement to test concepts and ideas with a broad range of stakeholders.

Australian stimulus spending also presents an ideal opportunity to invest in enduring sustainable solutions both outside and within of our sector. Transitioning our national energy policy by investing in catalyst transitional solutions and public (and EV) transport systems, are just some of the opportunities for stimulus investment that would provide legacy benefits. Others include investing in supply chain corridor protection, partnering in multi-functional infrastructure assets and stronger investment in marine reserves.

Pleasingly, many ports, terminal operators and industries associated with the port sector throughout Australia have already commenced significant work in the sustainability space. All port entities in Queensland (and some single commodity terminals such as Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal) have a focussed effort in this space - with several now having detailed sustainability strategies. And many more port entities across the country are also taking action - from Geraldton to Geelong, Port Hedland to Port Kembla, a wave of activity is evident.



Jason Sprott, owner and director, Sprott Planning & Environment

Through and beyond COVID-19, we must continue this work.

Globally, the World Port Sustainability Program has been underway since March 2018. As Australia's representative at both the launch of the WPSP in Antwerp in 2018 and the multi-stakeholder workshop forum at UN Headquarters in Geneva in 2019, we can confidently say that the WPSP program is well accepted by the global industry and major stakeholders.

The WPSP has proactively responded through this period and prepared an information portal with a collection of number of interesting articles and information banks and, run a series of COVID-19 webinars which are freely available via its website.

In future issues of DCN, we plan to showcase practical, working examples of achievements in our sector, despite the impact of COVID-19. These will highlight policy developments and on-the-ground efforts within the sector as we collectively work towards a sustainable future in the world of the new normal. ■