

# Draft National Ports Strategy

## Comments to the Infrastructure Coordinator, Infrastructure Australia

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## 1. Introduction

Engineers Australia is the peak body for engineering in Australia, representing all disciplines and branches of engineering. Engineers Australia has over 90,000 individual members Australia-wide making Engineers Australia the largest and most diverse engineering association in Australia. All Engineers Australia members are bound by a common commitment to promote engineering and to facilitate its practice for the common good.

Engineers Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Ports Strategy and strongly supports its development. The development and maintenance of Australia's infrastructure has suffered because of a lack of integration and coordination. The development of a national ports strategy is an essential component of the suite of long-term national strategies required for infrastructure of national significance.

## 2. Quality of Port Infrastructure

Engineers Australia has been rating Australia's economic infrastructure, including port infrastructure, since 1999. In 1999, 2001 and 2005, national Infrastructure Report Cards were published. State report Cards were published in 2003 and 2004 for NSW and Queensland respectively, with the Report Cards for the remaining States and Territories being published in 2005.

The purposes of the Report Cards are to:

- Raise the awareness of politicians, media, business and the public that infrastructure underpins the community's quality of life and that inadequate infrastructure impedes economic and social growth, and reduces environmental and societal sustainability.
- Generate debate on the adequacy of the infrastructure (including condition, distribution, funding and timing) required to meet society's needs.
- Increase appreciation of the value of developing an integrated and strategic approach to the provision of infrastructure.
- Raise awareness of the new challenges facing Australia's infrastructure due to climate change, change in demographics, demand increases, resilience and sustainability.
- Improve the policy, regulation, planning, provision, operation and maintenance of infrastructure.

The Report Cards provide a strategic overview of Australia's infrastructure that other organisations can use when they undertake detailed analysis of particular infrastructures. They also provide a benchmark that the community can use to identify needs and evaluate alternative infrastructure priorities over time.

In past Report Cards, and in two of 2010 State and Territory Report Cards released to date in 2010, Australia's ports have received a reasonable rating. Generally, the Report Cards have found that only minor changes are required to enable port infrastructure to be fit for its current and anticipated future purposes.

Investigations to date show that there has been an increase in the development of plans for port improvement in the context of integrated transport planning and strategic plans for many main ports have been developed.

However, one of the key themes raised has been the issue of urban encroachment, and that over the longer term, substantial problems arise due to a lack of efficient and effective integration in the

provision of road, rail and port infrastructure. It is imperative that land use decisions include consideration of the long term efficient operation of port infrastructure if we are to recognise the national significance of this vital import and export infrastructure.

Another theme that is not covered sufficiently in terms of long-term planning is land use planning for new ports. While there has been some recognition of the need for new ports outside the major metropolitan areas to cope with future demand, it appears that they will not begin construction until the need arises. Setting aside land for new ports must occur earlier rather than later. Land for freight corridors must also be set aside. Consideration also needs to be given to setting aside land for intermodal centres that will need to shift from their current locations.

### 3. National Vision

Engineers Australia fully supports the development of a national ports strategy. This concept aligns with our many previous submissions to government over the past decade and more calling for a national approach to infrastructure of national significance. We strongly support the vision and objective specified in the draft document, particularly the action priorities for:

- planning for relevant ports and infrastructure;
- protection of the ability to execute plans;
- improving landside efficiency and reliability; and
- clarity, transparency and responsibilities in ports.

Strategic planning and implementation of efficient transport infrastructure corridors and the use of real time technology to improve efficiency will become increasingly important given the projected population growth and expected rise in maritime trade in Australia over the next 20 to 50 years.

We therefore welcome the recommendation that plans should have a 20 year horizon. The linkage between this proposed national ports strategy and the COAG agreement on Future Strategic Planning of Capital Cities (where there is an agreement that planning systems will provide transport corridors, intermodal connections and reservation of land for future expansion) is particularly important.

An issue that is consistently raised in all report cards is that of traffic congestion, and it is pleasing to see that this is discussed in the document. The impact of congestion on national productivity is something that needs to be seriously considered in the development of future plans.

Engineers Australia also believes that it is essential to have consistency of legislation and regulation between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth.

### 4. Issues requiring further consideration

In developing this response to the draft National Ports Strategy, members of Engineers Australia commented on a particular issue that seems to have received little attention, that is, environmental and health and safety impacts at ports, which have become increasingly important over the last decade.

There will be a significant increase in bulk commodity throughputs and this will be accompanied by the subsequent increase in environmental and health impacts. Particular risks include:

- noise, dust and water pollution due to the operations of loading, storage and unloading;
- cross contamination of products, such as between grain and minerals;

- transport impacts, including pollution and noise; and
- biodiversity impacts.

The recent events at the Port of Esperance and Darwin Port highlight this issue.

The recent Parliamentary report into the Port of Esperance incident concluded that the deaths of 9500 native birds in December 2006 and March 2007 resulted from lead poisoning from Magellan Metals lead carbonate concentrate, which had been handled by the Esperance Port Authority from April 2005 until March 2007.

Of more concern, were the findings of the report that a quarter of the children under five years of age that were tested, showed an impact from lead contamination. The committee found that this was caused by an escape of lead dust during the usual out loading practices at the port, which occurred on 22 occasions, and a number of key dust incidents occurring during ship-loading at the port, which released significant lead pollution into the environment.

The Port of Darwin was issued with a Pollution Abatement Notice in April 2010 in relation to incidents involving the spillage of copper concentrate at Darwin Harbor in 2009 and 2010.

The safety issue may be covered under the “lower landside transport costs through improved efficiencies” or the “clarity, transparency and responsibilities in ports” priority, but Engineers Australia believes safety and sustainability issues need to be considered as a separate priority. Engineers Australia has a very strong ethos of promoting sustainability in all engineering practice, and extends this to the construction and operation of all infrastructure, including ports and freight corridors.

Another aspect of safety that has been raised for further consideration by Infrastructure Australia is perspective that better ports can make a contribution to transport safety improvements. High quality land access (rail and road) to ports will undoubtedly result in improved transport safety. The draft strategy could be improved by making explicit mention of this facet of good infrastructure provision. Engineers Australia would like to see a strategic analysis of harbour-side, in-port and land side safety issues.

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