

The Case Against Port Botany's Big Expansion Is Overwhelming

Community groups in Sydney's south and west have united to send a loud NO to the Commission of Inquiry into the Proposal to expand Port Botany. The expansion would treble the containers passing through the Port from the present 1 million a year to 3 million. The Inquiry begins May 31st.

"This is a terrible proposal that will permanently blight Sydney's industrial heartland if it goes ahead," says **Gary Blaschke** who speaks for over 30 angry community organisations. "It will gridlock the already congested traffic around the Port. It will damage the struggling marine life of Botany Bay. It will make the Port area more of a terrorist target than it is now."

He is supported by **Bob Walshe**, who chairs a group of 8 Sutherland Shire organisations, and who summarises what he calls "an overwhelming community case"...

10 Compelling Reasons to Reject Expansion



The well-known road congestion around the M5-Port Botany-Alexandria area will worsen into gridlock if many hundreds more of these semi-trailers are released onto the roads by Port Botany's expansion.

1 Fundamentally, a major contradiction undoes this Proposal.

A prime reason given by Sydney Ports Corporation to justify expanding its already large container Port is that Sydney's 4 million population will "exceed 5 million by 2020". BUT that is the best reason for NOT expanding a Port which is hemmed in by the over-populated, traffic-choked M5-Airport-Alexandria-Banksmeadow area of Sydney.

On top of population increase, every other pressure is increasing right now in this crowded area - before any port expansion takes place! For instance, the Airport alone will treble its annual passenger numbers to an incredible 63 million over the next two decades. Imagine the traffic from that! Port facilities for containers should be developed anywhere but at Port Botany. Fortunately, other options exist, especially at Newcastle and Port Kembla.

2 The Proposal is narrowly short-term, despite state-wide cries for long-term infrastructure planning.

Sydney Ports Corporation is a profit-oriented agency of the NSW State Government; it is in competition with the port corporations of Newcastle and Port Kembla. Hardly surprising, then, that its Proposal to expand Port Botany is narrowly self-interested, deserving to be rejected as a short-sighted, profit-motivated expedient.

By contrast, any independent planner would recognise that the population of congested Sydney is surging outward

to north, south and west, shaping a "greater Sydney" which will soon embrace Newcastle and Wollongong and will need their ports.

3 Two million containers at Port Botany will be more than enough, and to push for three million is absurd.

Last year the Port handled over 1 million containers and its trucks and trailers contributed heavily to the area's congestion and polluted air.

Locals are quick to point out that the Port has a capacity to handle 2 million containers annually without needing the hugely expensive 5 extra berths plus 60 hectares of bay reclamation that the Proposal requires.

"Look here," say indignant residents, "that capacity of 2 million is far more than this area's roads can carry - and 3 million should be dismissed as ridiculous."

4 Transport congestion alone should be enough to sink the expansion Proposal.

At least half of Sydney's drivers know only too well the congestion that already clogs this M5-Airport-Botany-Alexandria area. Typical is the SMH report of 11-12 October last year that the M5 East tunnel is "bumper to bumper with semi-trailers".

All this traffic is increasing now. Think of how just one of the dozen Bay-region council areas, Sutherland Shire, adds nearly 3,000 new vehicles every year. Add vehicles that will stream in from the recent western land releases around Bringelly and Marsden Park. Add vehicles wanting to get to the Airport as it trebles

passenger numbers. Add - but no. Stop! Only Sydney Ports Corporation can't see the enormity of its Proposal to inject hundreds more semi-trailers into this nightmarish scene. (Increased freight-rail movements could only handle part of the proposed container growth.)

5 The Proposal will impact harshly on the struggling ecology of historic Botany Bay.

This is a unique Bay, widely known as "Birthplace of Modern Australia" and "First Meeting Place of the Aboriginal and European Cultures". What a heritage! But all that is flouted by the proposed expansion which puts yet another bulky development ahead of the Bay's history and health.

The migratory birds that have visited the Bay for thousands of years, and their feeding/breeding habitats, are protected by the international Ramsar Convention (1975), so the Federal Government should exert its power to stop what can't be anything but a damaging development.

Bay, birds and beaches have suffered much from the last 50 years of hectic development - by oil refinery, airport runways, container wharves, petro-chemical storages, and more. Expanding the Port means inflicting added damage - by deep dredging of 7.5 million cubic metres of sand, concreting 60 hectares of "reclaimed" bay, increased coming and going of big container ships, new ships that will be even longer and deeper-hulled, more pressure on once-abundant seagrasses, new



A small section of Port Botany's wharves. This huge ship carries 6,600 containers. Present port facilities have about ten years to go before capacity is reached - plenty of time to get the ports of Newcastle and Port Kembla functioning and so avoid expanding Port Botany.

wave energies further eroding Towra, Kurnell and other beaches... A scenario of ecological depletion within the Bay to parallel the traffic congestion around the Bay!

6 The hazardous potential of Botany-Banksmeadow is in need of reduction, not the expansion proposed.

Few Sydney people realise that Port Botany is an extension of what Premier Bob Carr in 1999 called "the densest concentration of hazardous industries in the state". It is in fact the most hazardous strip of industrial land in Australia (with residential housing mixed through it!).

A Dept of Environment report speaks of "flammable liquids, mainly petroleum products... liquified flammable gases... potential toxic materials... highly reactive substances". A fire or explosion at any point on the strip would almost certainly have knock-on effects. So, increasing the density of the strip by expanding Port Botany should not be considered.

7 The Proposal has come at the worst time - when terrorists are shifting from targeting airports to targeting seaports.

In March his year, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson ordered a review of security at the nation's 70 ports, "with Sydney at the top of the list". A submission to the Commission of Inquiry declares: "Port Botany at present is the stand-

out potential target of terrorism and... an expanded Port Botany handling 2-3 million containers (now 1.1 million) will constitute a greatly enhanced risk. Expansion will further crowd the Botany-Banksmeadow strip."

Premier Carr acknowledged that a bomb could enter in a container and then be detonated from a distance (speaking on 2GB, 24 March). "Too many eggs in the Port Botany basket," say locals. "Other ports, like Newcastle and Port Kembla, are keen to take more containers."

8 An ALTERNATIVE exists to the destructive, potentially dangerous Port Botany Proposal.

The councils, businesses and unions of Newcastle and Wollongong (Port Kembla) are keen to get more container trade to stimulate employment, commerce and regional development. The necessary upgrading of freight-handling facilities and rail-freight links with Sydney would of course be expensive, but so would the expansion of Port Botany.

The estimated cost of Port Botany's expansion, \$580 million, should be added to major funds offered to NSW by the Federal Government for (a) rail-to-port connections, (b) an improved freight line between Brisbane-Sydney-Melbourne. This would be healthy long-term planning, bringing state-wide and national advantages - in stark contrast to the narrow expansion of Port Botany.

9 There is TIME for a "greater Sydney" freight solution - instead of rushing into Port Botany's expansion.

Sydney Ports Corporation is trying to rush the Government into a quick start on its Port expansion. A spurious urgency! The Port easily handles over a million containers a year now; and with the trade growing by 5% to 7% a year, it has 8-12 years before existing capacity of 2 million is reached.

Devastation of the beach that has protected Towra Nature Reserve for 5,000 years. Typical of what has happened to the Bay's many beaches, it has lost 50-100 metres breadth of beach, eroded by waves rebounding across Botany Bay from collision with wharves and runways. The sandbagging is a brave attempt to check continuing erosion, but erosion will accelerate if Port Botany is expanded.

In short, a decade is available, during which Federal-State funding could carry out the upgrading of the freight-rail of an integrated Newcastle-Sydney-Port Kembla system.

This would be, says a submission to the Inquiry, "planned growth... of the 250 km Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong coastal strip... with parallel passenger and freight capacity... a proud 'greater Sydney' [in place of] the randomness of the developer-driven growth that is now proceeding".

10 A newly announced Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney will surely find that the narrowly conceived Port Botany Expansion would fatally obstruct achieving an environmentally sustainable, traffic-flowing Sydney.

In the very month before the Inquiry into the Port Proposal, Premier Carr and his Planning Minister Craig Knowles have announced the preparation of a "New Sydney Plan", a "25 year planning blueprint", called the Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, which promises to be "fundamentally different" from earlier attempts to plan Sydney's growth.

Welcoming a year's public discussion of this Strategy, Gary Blaschke says, "This is at least a hope of long-term planning. But it must therefore start by realising the incompatibility of such planning with the short-term, traffic-congesting, bay-damaging Port Botany Expansion Proposal. It must ensure that Sydney and its urban spread to north and south is planned to produce the integrated Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong greater Sydney that our city and state need for a future we can be proud of."

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