TRADE IN TIMES OF DISRUPTION



The Regional Shipping, Port Connectivity & Road Freight Challenges discussion panel examined the key dynamics shaping shipping and freight in Australia and New Zealand

Industry leaders at the Australia & New Zealand Shipping & Logistics Conference examined persistent disruption, AI-driven freight operations and ports' role in delivering the energy transition.

Disruption and the move towards greater use of artificial intelligence was a central theme of the Australia & New Zealand Shipping & Logistics Conference, an event organised by the Freight & Trade Alliance.

Held at the Sheraton Grand Sydney near Hyde Park, the event brought together a cross section of industry figures to discuss the key topics of the day as well as evening functions allowing opportunities for networking.

A Welcome to Country was performed by First Nations Educator Josh Toomey, followed by a video message from federal trade minister Don Farrell.

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries assistant secretary (tariffs division) Simon Clayton provided some insights on the global trade environment and how it had changed particularly in the previous 18 months.

Charles Finny, chair, New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, also commented on the global trade environment from a Kiwi perspective.

Comments were also provided by James Hookham, director, Global Shippers Forum and from Amazon Logistics Network's Carl Berger regarding efficiency, innovation and sustainability.

Rebecca Dye from the US Federal Maritime Commission spoke about the global shipping environment and data-driven decision making.

A panel on landside charges, National Transport Commission Reform and Part X of competition law, was chaired by Container Transport Alliance Australia director Neil Chambers.

DISRUPTION NOW A CONSTANT

WiseTech chief executive Zubin Appoo used his presentation to explain that disruption was now a constant as global supply chains underwent a fundamental redesign.

Mr Appoo spoke of "exponential tech advancements" in a world that was ever more connected and digital as well as increasingly volatile.

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"Today disruption is constant and stability is the occasional, pleasant surprise," he said.

"The good news is all these factors create enormous opportunity for our industry. AI is a key enabler, but it cannot operate in a vacuum. I am not just talking about automating existing processes... I am talking about a fundamental redesign of how the industry actually operates."

He noted many core industry processes had been around for decades or even centuries that had "evolved in a world of paper documents".

"The bill of lading document is older than almost anything else in modern business. It has been around for 700 years.

"The idea of customs declarations are ancient too, they were collected at city gates thousands of years ago. That is either an extraordinary example of enduring innovation, or a fairly confronting example of how slowly our industry changes."

He spoke of the need for government and freight forwarders to work together and that workflows were "only as good as the data".

Adopting industry-wide digital standards was also "critical for accelerating digitisation of processes".

He said they were working closely with International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Digital Container Shipping Association (DCSA) on digital standards.

"Global trade is increasingly complex and anyone who says otherwise has never worked in the industry or has somehow avoided customs for their entire career," he said.

During the conference, it was announced that Sydney software company Clear.ai had facilitated the "successful transformation" of Qube Global's freight forwarding business via the deployment of Clear.ai's AI-native freight and customs platform.

The concept was said to mark an industry shift: manual data entry has been removed from Qube Global's freight forwarding operations, replacing traditional, process-heavy workflows with an autonomous, AI operating model.

Clear.ai founder Anthony Wan, said Qube approached them with a vision to rebuild their entire freight forwarding operations around AI.


Port of Newcastle CEO, Craig Carmody


A.P. Moller-Maersk Head of APAC Origination, Pernille Saugmann Olsen


FMC Commissioner, Rebecca Dye


The De Minimis Reform, Trusted Trader, Cargo Systems & Trade Compliance discussion panel



OneStop CEO, Sam Askin



WiseTech Global CEO, Zubin Appoo


Amazon Director of Logistics and Export Operations, Carl Berger


The AI, E-Documentation, Visibility Platforms, Offshoring & Workforce discussion panel

"Enterprise migrations of this scale can take many months or even years. Qube completed the transition to Clear.ai in just 18 weeks across a complex, high-volume operation, while radically increasing the capacity of its team," Mr Wan said.

Qube Holdings director, logistics and infrastructure, John Digney, said true digital transformation was about "fundamentally changing what work gets done. In our forwarding business, we have completely removed data entry".

"That entire category of manual work is gone," Mr Digney said.

DECARBONISATION EFFORTS

Port of Newcastle chief executive Craig Carmody spoke about decarbonisation and how ports could help bring it to fruition.

Mr Carmody said the global energy transition was often discussed in terms of targets, investment plans and policy frameworks.

However, the transition would occur less through frameworks, rather it would be "delivered in steel, blades, nacelles, tower components, solar panels, batteries ... which all require vessels, berths, storage areas and road movements".

"Sea ports are where Australia's energy transition and climate change commitments meet the practical reality of Australian supply chains," he said.

"Being the world's largest exporting coal port ... which is almost entirely thermal and is critical to the energy security of several of our Asian partners.

"The Port of Newcastle is very mindful that our key role is to keep supply chains connected so trade flows as efficiently and productively as possible ... 24 hours a day, 365 days a year."

He said PoN played three key roles in the transition.

"First, we're a trade gateway. We connect Australian producers and consumers to global markets, and we keep essential trade moving through volatility, disruption and capacity constraints," he said.

"Second, we're an industrial platform. We concentrate land, berths, channel, utilities, skills and industrial customers in one place.

"Those are precisely the ingredients you need to develop a new energy supply chain... and as the port, the NSW Government and energy developers have come to understand they are extraordinarily hard to assemble anywhere else."

Third, he said, they were an energy connector.

"Renewable projects do not just depend on a berth. They depend on road, rail, storage, approvals and receiving-site readiness... the whole chain from pit to port and now ... port to development." ■