



# The Curve of Confusion

By BRETT CHARLTON, Chairman – Tasmanian Logistics Committee

If NASA issued a press release saying that there is a space craft heading our way then it would probably appear on page seven at the moment and you would skip over it to the next COVID-19 story.

Seriously though, I am sure everyone at some point has contemplated the mental health side of this mad time on our planet and never has a concept such as “R U OK? Day” been as relevant as now. Taking the time to ask someone how they are doing at the moment is a deeper conversation than the traditional Aussie shallow greeting of “how ‘ya goin’” and an extra couple of minutes having a genuine conversation is something that can go a long way – it is certainly something that I have found to be more prevalent in day to day communications at the moment. We are all in this mess together.

Speaking of a mess, there isn't a day that goes by at the moment where the grey hairs on my beard don't get a little lighter. Equipment and space shortages in various ports, industrial action, weather, increased infrastructure surcharges, maddening upward curves (everything has a curve now) of import freight rates mixed with the day to day contemplation of “what does this lockdown level in this area mean” is a whirlpool of complexity that has to be navigated because freight forwarders, transport companies and related supply chain services are now the superheroes of the planet – but Darth Vader and his mates are standing on every corner at the moment just throwing bad voodoo in front of everything.

The above said however, there always seems to be a way and in the majority of cases the champions of our industry are trying to plow through the issues on an hourly basis and by and large have had some success. When level 4 was announced in Melbourne there was concern around how the impact of distribution centres would impact the supply chain to and from Tasmania. There was an underlying understanding that the essentials like food and basic supplies would be ticked off as all ok, but the construction industry was concerned. Some timber supply companies were contemplating not being able to deliver timber into Melbourne and whilst obviously devastating from that industry's perspective, some of the trucking companies were contemplating a potential 60% reduction in drivers as a result. Trailers moving timber north to the big island are used to bringing things back (obviously) so for a while there some real concern was being raised about empty equipment flows between Tasmania and the mainland.

Whilst everyone was thinking about food and necessities, some were thinking about how a potential lack of trailers over Bass Strait may impact such things as packaging for wine, honey, beer etc. By all accounts, it seems that the timber business has been able to accommodate the level 4 scenarios and trailers are moving – but who knows what will happen next week. Discussions with customers indicate they are definitely looking to increase their on-island stock holdings of packaging “just in case”.

My recent appointment to the National Freight and Supply Chain Industry Reference Panel has been eye opening. There is certainly a lot of work going

into this at Commonwealth and State levels and we have recently embarked on a survey program to understand if industry have an awareness of the action areas, whether industry consider governments are working on ‘the right things’ to deliver results and how well industry believes the actions are progressing. From my perspective, one of the challenges will be how the focus on the action areas will change as a result of COVID-19. It is an interesting and important role - I cannot help but feel a sense of pride in being involved in the future direction of the freight and supply chain at a National level (it is also nice to be representing Tasmania in this as well).

Like most of us I expect, I am reading reports on reports from various sources as well as webinars and conference calls around what the future looks like. It is a brave person that can categorically make a statement around what their position is. From my point of view, I certainly hope that stability and cooperation emerge as the position of choice for all, as if there was ever a time this was needed it is now.

I sincerely wish for you, your families and co-workers all the best for this concerning time that we find ourselves in.

