

Huge cruise ship coke bust

Ian Ackerman

A HAUL of 95 kg of cocaine was found secreted in suitcases on a cruise ship berthed at Sydney on Sunday (August 28).

Australian Border Force officers made the detection while searching several passenger cabins on the ship with detector dogs.

Three Canadians were arrested and are charged with importing a commercial quantity of cocaine; the maximum penalty for this offence is life imprisonment. Two women, aged

23 and 28 were arrested, along with a 63-year-old man.

"Today's successful operation has resulted in three arrests and we will not rule out further activity as we continue our investigations," AFP assistant commissioner, crime operations Shane Connelly said.

The stash was discovered during a joint operation between the ABF and the Australian Federal Police in cooperation with the US Department of Homeland Security Investigations, the New Zealand Customs Service and the Canada Border Services Agency.



Photo: US Dept of Justice

Rail key to de-clogging Melbourne transport

Former deputy prime minister Tim Fischer is to officially announce a report into how Victoria can boost its rail network, reports DAVID SEXTON

A NEW plan proposed by a transport industry peak body says rail is imperative to unclog Melbourne for both people and freight.

The 25-year plan, called InterCity: How Regional Rail Can Re-Balance Population Growth and Create a 'State of Cities' in Victoria, is to be formally launched on September 5 at RMIT University by former Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer.

The plan is expected to form the centrepiece of a strategy to redirect some of the growth from Mel-

bourne into Victorian regional cities and towns.

A key feature of the plan is a 10-year program to deliver progressive improvements in train journey time, capacity, frequency and reliability on all regional lines via infrastructure and service improvements.

A second phase, starting around 2027, would provide a change in capacity and journey times with faster trains and new lines, including a Melbourne Airport hub linked with the lines to Bendigo, Seymour, Shepparton and Albury.

Another feature would be the linking of regional cities Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo via a new standard gauge rail network in western Victoria to complement the freight-based Murray Basin Rail Project.

Rail Futures Institute secretary, Dr Bill Russell, said the driving force behind InterCity was evidence improved rail service was a powerful

and effective tool for redirecting growth to regional centres.

"It can help distribute economic and social benefits across the state," he said.

"Melbourne is already experiencing the difficulties of rapid growth, urban sprawl and traffic congestion choking the city. Building more roads will not solve the problem."

State ports minister Luke Donnellan has himself referred to the problems of congestion during several transport industry conferences in recent months.

Dr Russell said by 2015, Melbourne could have as much as 80% of the population of Victoria.

"This outcome does not meet the government's own statutory planning and strategic planning objectives which require that Victoria's population be rebalanced from Melbourne to regional Victoria," he said.

Record bulker to boost Geelong grain efficiency

David Sexton

FIRST Geelong had a record draft tanker. Now, it has had a record draft bulker.

Cyprus-flagged vessel Efraim A arrived in to the port recently before leaving for China with a consignment of grain.

At 11.9metres, it is the deepest draft vessel of its type to have visited Victoria's second port.

Lloyd's List Australia recently reported that the introduction of Dynamic Under Keel Clearance (DUKC) technology had already boosted the port with the arrival of the aframax tanker, Phoenix Advance.

Harbour master Dilip Abraham told Lloyd's List Australia the introduction of DUKC represented "an ocean of opportunity" for the port.

"It bodes really well for the port and the new owners (Brookfield, who have inherited the Asciano assets)."

Graincorp Victoria ports manager Craig Cochrane said the ship arrived

in Geelong from South Australia partially loaded with a barley cargo of 20,000 tonnes.

However once fully loaded, the total cargo of 63,000 tonnes of grain was 5,000 more than ever had been loaded on a single ship at terminal.

"It means we can load at one port rather than two ports in order to get

to 63,000 tonnes which is a lot cheaper," Mr Cochrane said.

"It is a major efficiency gain. Previously you might have called at Geelong and loaded 55,000 tonnes and then called at Portland and loaded another 10,000 or so.

"From our point of view, DUKC is certainly delivering benefits."

Ageing workforce issues identified

David Sexton

ATTRACTING younger workers and boosting female participation are critical to meeting the needs of the Australian maritime sector, an issues paper says.

The issues paper was prepared by a Maritime Industry Reference Committee and noted that Australia's maritime workforce was one of the oldest in the country, with 65% of workers 45 years or older.

"In the short to medium term, the ability to successfully attract, train and retain young workers will be critical in meeting the skills' needs of the industry," the paper noted.

"Provision of mentoring and leadership training to skilled operators with comprehensive technical knowledge will enable them to help develop younger workers and assist employers with retention.

"Targeting female participation could increase the available labour pool."

Other issues identified include so-called stagnation in the growth rate of the Australian mineral and energy commodities sector and its immediate effect on shipping activity, as well as the ongoing decline in numbers of 'blue water' Australian-flagged ships.

There was also reference to the introduction of new technology and its effect upon industry.

Australian Industry Standards has been asked by the IRC to collect feedback from interested stakeholders about these issues.

Feedback on the four-year Workplan for the Maritime Training Package can be submitted to the AISC by September 30, 2016 with responses emailed to enquiries@australianindustrystandards.org.au

Port infrastructure upgrading begins

Ian Ackerman

WITH the assistance of a \$2.3m investment, logistics operations at the Port of Mackay will soon be more efficient.

Queensland treasurer Curtis Pitt said the latest aspect of the program of works would deliver a \$1.9m upgrade of the port's Harbour Road East intersection and construction of a new, 1.9 hectare laydown area.

"Infrastructure investments such as the Harbour Road East upgrade are about improving efficiency and attracting new customers to help support the economic development of Queensland and the Mackay region," he said.

Queensland ports minister Mark Bailey said upgrading the port would help improve transport efficiency and help promote jobs.

"Locals can expect to see up to 26 people employed on site through to the end of September when works are scheduled to finish," he said.

"This program of works will support trade growth for the next 25 years."

North Queensland Bulk Ports acting CEO Jeff Stewart-Harris welcomed the investment.

"In addition to the \$1.9 million Accelerated Works package, NQBP has committed a further \$400,000 for stormwater drainage on Presto Avenue and the completion of roadworks at Spiller Avenue," he said.

The works will be carried out by local construction firm EPOCA Constructions.

New energy-efficient LED street lighting will also be installed to improve safety and visibility at the intersection.



Image: Jim Wilson and Hema Maps

Tas wood exports top three million tonnes

David Sexton

STATE resources minister Guy Barnett is spruiking a resurgence in the Tasmanian timber industry with figures from TasPorts showing export of wood products had passed three million tonnes for the first time in five years.

This was for the 12 months to July 1, 2016.

In a prepared statement, Mr Barnett said the statistics reflected renewed confidence and industry security, with laws aimed at protecting workers from "radical protestors".

"As a result, the industry's fortunes are turning around. Investment, employment, exports and earnings are all rising," he said.

Mr Barnett criticised also criticised the previous govern-

ment for what he said was removing resource security and facilitating "the sale of a vital export port" to detractors who "destroyed the infrastructure".

This was a reference to Triabunna port just east of the state's capital Hobart.

Most Tasmanian wood products and woodchip are exported through Bell Bay at the mouth of the Tamar River in the state's north however this remains problematic given there is extensive woodchip production in the south of the state.

Woodchip exports previously occurred through Triabunna however it was bought by millionaire Graeme Wood who opposes wood-chipping and wants to create a marina as well as build tourist accommodation, a cooking school and botanic gardens.



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