Since the 1950s, many investigations into new port infrastructure, and plans from both sides of politics, have concluded that the Outer Harbour is the site for Perth’s next major port. For many reasons, these plans did not proceed. But circumstances, contexts and communities change, and it would be a disservice to Western Australia to assume any of these earlier investigations or plans remain valid in 2019 and for the next 50 years.

Due to forward thinking when it was first designed, Fremantle has had the capacity to manage the trade task comfortably up until now. But with at least 10 years’ lead-time required to plan, design and construct the new port, we are getting close to needing to move forward.

A new approach was adopted to ensure that Westport would not be just another bullet point on the list of port plans that did not proceed. We committed to using only facts and research to determine our answer. We also committed to being transparent by sharing all the facts and findings that shape our options assessment and determine the best long-term solution for the State.

Through our reports, the Westport Beacons, community events, Reference Group meetings, focus groups, interviews and workshops, Westport has shared our progress and findings at every stage of the project. It was my personal commitment when I signed on as the Westport Chair that the project be open, transparent, inclusive and that my role be independent.

Earlier this month, we released a suite of five Westport Beacons that reported the outcomes from our first multi-criteria assessment (MCA-1). I appreciate there was a lot of information to digest. I have subsequently noticed some incorrect information, half-truths and assumptions appearing in public discussion, which makes me think that there’s still a lack of understanding around the project from some quarters.

I am sharing more information through this Project Update to help correct these misunderstandings.

As a politically sensitive project, Westport is likely to be scrutinised and reviewed many times in the future. Westport has had three audits this year alone. With so many check-points, record-keeping and due diligence frameworks integrated into Westport’s governance process, it would be impossible to deliver anything but an honest analysis and results based on the inputs – that’s our commitment and that’s what we are delivering.

A panel of independent and highly qualified subject matter experts continually peer review Westport’s work from an external perspective. They provide technical guidance across a range of issues – from environment to port operations to spatial information systems. This panel is chaired by John Langoulant AO, who has been assessing Westport since its beginnings and found our process to be sound and reliable.
When someone of John’s standing, experience and authority is outspoken in favour of Westport, it speaks volumes.

Where specific expertise has been required, Westport has commissioned leading organisations to undertake research free of bias or preconceived outcomes. All reports are peer reviewed to ensure their reliability and independence.

I hope this insight into the rigorous processes, governance frameworks and protocols that Westport must adhere to has provided you with comfort that our findings are reliable and the conclusions have not been manipulated.

Thank you again for following our journey and I hope that I can count on your continued support.

Sincerely,

Nicole Lockwood
Independent Chair
Westport Taskforce

Here are the facts

Westport is using funds responsibly

There have been recent comments that the Westport Taskforce process is costing $20 million.

In fact, the Department of Transport has allocated around $8 million for Westport’s work over three years, as documented in the Western Australia State Budget 2019-20.

As stated earlier, there have been many investigations into new port infrastructure over the past five decades. Westport aggregated this comprehensive library of technical reports and data from industry and government to establish the foundation for our work. This rigorous evidence-based approach has ensured an highly efficient, robust analysis and avoided unnecessary spending. The project outcomes have been delivered to a strict budget with a small project team.

Participating in the MCA process

Due to the commercially sensitive information shared with the participants in Westport’s MCA workshops, the decision was made to limit attendees to technical specialists from government and consultants in Westport’s process. Through these organisations, Westport had the required diversity, expertise, experience and context to deliver a robust MCA outcome.

Altogether, 78 subject matter experts from 23 organisations participated in 16 hours of workshops facilitated by an independent MCA specialist to deliver Westport’s MCA-1 scores and rankings.

John provided these comments in support of Westport:

“I have been very impressed with Westport’s process and level of engagement. The range of issues being covered is appropriate. The level of analysis is sound and the attention to detail impressive. The outcomes of MCA-1 are reliable and the work being undertaken for MCA-2 is extensive.”
Fremantle’s capacity

While the Inner Harbour could handle up to 2.1 million TEU on its current footprint, Westport’s investigations have determined that the maximum capacity of the roads and rail serving the port is only 1.2 million TEU assuming current operating practices and existing infrastructure. Operational changes, such as running high productivity vehicles or encouraging more off-peak freight movements, are currently being investigated to see if they can substantially improve this capacity.

To expand Fremantle’s capacity to 2.1 million TEU would still require $1.4* billion in rail upgrades, $2.3* billion in upgrades to the Fremantle road network and more than $1* billion to upgrade Leach Highway – a total cost of approximately $4.7* billion, without any additional work done to the port itself.

Further detail on the upgrades required to expand Fremantle to 3.8 million TEU can be found in Westport Beacon 8: Why Fremantle can’t handle the long-term freight task alone.

Even though Fremantle’s container capacity may be limited, Westport is still considering two options in our shortlist that rely on keeping Fremantle as a working container port for the long-term. The other three options all see Fremantle remain operating as a port for passenger vessels, naval vessels, and others, such as trading vessels docking for minor repairs, ferries and cruise ships.

*Preliminary working cost estimates only
“Rushing to build a new port”? 

The Westport Taskforce was established to develop a plan; a long-term, strategic and holistic freight plan to manage Perth’s future growth. Our focus has only been on developing this high-level plan, which – if it is endorsed by Government – would then have to go through processes including development of a business case, environmental approvals, and a detailed design phase, which would take around five years.

So it will be at least five years from now before any construction commences. And then it will take another 5-6 years to construct and commission the port before it is operational.

Let’s be clear on the timeframes here – if Westport powers full steam ahead in our process, the earliest the new port will be functioning is the early 2030s. At any time in the planning phase, if trade decreases, we can slow down the rate of progress.

It is also ill-informed to suggest that the State Government should not begin planning a new port until the Inner Harbour reaches capacity. Given the minimum 10-year planning and construction period, commencing that work only when the Inner Harbour and its road and rail corridors are already at capacity would have immense economic impacts for the whole State, potentially gridlocking the road network around Fremantle, and have major effects on the communities living around Fremantle and along the transport corridors.

Container forecasts versus population growth

As explained at length in Westport Beacon 5: Long-term container trade forecasts, Westport commissioned two very highly respected organisations, Deloitte Access Economics and the Western Australian Treasury Corporation (WATC), to determine the long-term container growth rates that were used in our forecasting.

This was done using an economic model that factored in many inputs including population growth, GDP growth and industry growth, but was largely based on what WATC called the ‘TEU GDP multiplier’. In their research, WATC found that, over the past 30 years, TEU growth is almost always a multiple of GDP growth.

To say that Westport only considered population growth in our forecasts is incorrect and misleading. To suggest that long-term container growth should only be calculated based on population numbers would be reckless, as it would likely lead to a scenario where container growth far exceeds forecasts and new infrastructure would not be ready in time.

It is also worth noting that Westport’s container forecast figure of 3.25 per cent annual growth is well below the growth rates being used by other ports around Australia (3.5 to 4.5 per cent), the 20-year average growth rate at Fremantle (5.4 per cent) and is conservative when compared to other benchmarks (3.9 to 4.7 per cent).

Forecasting is not a precise science, so Westport will continually monitor the container trade figures and make any necessary adjustments in our modelling, which may then have flow-on effects as to when new infrastructure is required.
Considering the environmental impacts on Cockburn Sound and surrounds

Cockburn Sound is one of the most utilised marine precincts in Western Australia. As a protected embayment, it is an ideal area for boating and diving, and also provides important habitat for a wide variety of marine flora and fauna.

Westport has embedded environmental considerations into our process from the outset. So it is profoundly untrue for anyone to say that Westport ignored the potential environmental impacts on Cockburn Sound.

An accusation that the Western Australian Marine Science Institution (WAMSI) – a highly regarded and well-respected marine research institute – doctored the outcomes of a literature assessment on Cockburn Sound and overlooked certain publications to favour an Outer Harbour, are unfounded and insulting to WAMSI.

In response to these claims, Dr Luke Twomey, Chief Executive Officer of WAMSI, provided these comments:

“Any insinuation that WAMSI would compromise our work or bias our findings to suit a desired outcome is outrageous, and poses a serious risk to our reputation. I emphatically refute these baseless and nasty accusations.”

Further, Westport’s independent environmental peer reviewer, Ian Le Provost, of Le Provost Environmental Pty Ltd, who has more than 35 years of experience in environmental impact assessments and management of coastal environments, said:

“I find it disappointing that Westport’s environmental work is being called into question, particularly by people who may not have a proper understanding of the information. In reviewing the WAMSI report in question, I found it to be an excellent piece of work that has required a rigorous review of literature and synthesis of available knowledge, along with a substantial amount of disciplined and robust thought. On the whole, I have found Westport’s environmental process and considerations to be comprehensive and in accordance with best practice guidelines.”
While a Kwinana port will be further away than Fremantle in relation to some current intermodal and inland freight facilities, this network may look and operate completely differently by the time the new port is established. There will almost certainly be a need for new facilities within Westport’s 50-year planning horizon, with some locations currently under consideration as possible future intermodal facilities being closer to Kwinana.

There will also be more positive outcomes for the freight industry than negatives in relation to the new port. The benefits to trucking companies of the new port will include:

- A seamless major freight route that connects directly from the doorstep of the new port through to Tonkin Highway and circles the metro area up to Muchea in the north – without a single traffic light. This corridor will allow trucks to travel at consistent speeds without the need for braking, saving on fuel and improving efficiency.

- Redirecting trucks out of high-density urban areas means much less interaction with passenger vehicles and improved safety outcomes for all road users.

- There is land available at Kwinana for further development, including a possible new intermodal facility at Latitude 32.

Another factor to consider is the gradual shift in WA’s population centre further south. The Perth metro area now stretches all the way to Mandurah and may eventually link with Bunbury. Having a port situated further south makes sense given this long-term trend.

**Port distance from intermodal terminals**

**Redeveloping North Quay**

In Westport’s first multi-criteria analysis, the criteria assessed for land use were:

- Port and transport corridor access
- Land availability and complexity of land acquisitions
- Land use compatibility (residential and recreational; industrial and commercial)
- Opportunity costs of Government-owned land
- Decommissioning and rehabilitation costs for existing infrastructure and land
- Land sale benefits

While it is true that the stand-alone Kwinana options that allowed the Fremantle land to be re-purposed and sold may have scored slightly higher on this criteria, this would have been countered by scoring lower when compared against the decommissioning and rehabilitation costs.

Also, the benefit of a multi-criteria analysis is that the options are scored against so many different criteria that a high score on just one or two individual criterion make very little difference to their overall scores and rankings. The top-ranked options cumulatively scored higher across all criteria, including environmental and social.
Considering Roe 8/9

One of the benefits of a multi-criteria analysis is that the large number of criteria assessed means that no single criterion can dominate the outcome. For the purposes of Westport's first MCA, the upgraded Leach Highway design, which was extensively investigated and used in the MCA-1 analysis, is essentially interchangeable with Roe 8/9.

While Roe 8/9 may have rated better than Leach Highway in terms of capacity, both options are very costly, continue to force cars and trucks to interact, and significantly impact surrounding residences and businesses. In addition, both road options share a ‘last mile’ design to the Inner Harbour that involves five major grade separations in North Fremantle, East Fremantle and Palmyra.

The low rankings of the Fremantle options in MCA-1 showed they rated poorly across many criteria.

Including Roe 8/9 in the assessment instead of Leach Highway may have seen the Fremantle options score slightly higher on the supply chain capacity criteria, but this would have been countered by lower scores on environment given the Beeliar Wetlands impacts, and capital costs given that Roe 8/9 is much more expensive than the Leach Highway upgrade (more than double the cost).

As such, including Roe 8/9 in the assessments would not have seen the Fremantle options make the shortlist.

Community concerns

It may perplex some North Fremantle residents and people living along the Fremantle freight rail line to hear that Westport is being accused of exaggerating the community’s concerns around growing truck movements and daily rail passings.

Westport has engaged at length with these community members. We have conducted free information sessions, surveys and detailed interviews with the community, as well as hosting a focus group specifically for people living along the freight rail line. It is absolutely clear that those residents who are directly impacted by the growing freight movements – the North Fremantle residents, those who live near or drive on Leach Highway, and especially those people living near the rail line – are very close to reaching their maximum tolerance levels for the ongoing noise, vibrations, emissions and safety concerns they endure.

Mitigating the impacts on these localised individuals will be considered by Westport as we look at how to maximise the lifespan of the Inner Harbour.

The wider Western Australian community should be concerned that the opportunity to build a state-of-the-art, globally competitive port that will deliver economic benefits to the State for decades to come could be compromised by interest groups that do not have a detailed understanding of the project. Westport is a project aiming to benefit all Western Australians, but without a perfect answer trade-offs are inevitable.
Increases in truck productivity

Westport commends the efforts made by industry to improve truck efficiency. However, as freight continues to increase, it is inevitable that truck numbers will also need to increase. Given the numbers of containers that Westport is forecasting in 50 years’ time, there is no evidence to suggest that further vehicle productivity improvements can contain truck impacts to anywhere near present levels. However, Westport is having ongoing conversations with operators to understand further opportunities for truck efficiency improvements.

There are also truck-related community concerns to be addressed, with ongoing discussions required to understand what mitigations can be implemented, industry’s appetite to apply them and whether Government has a role to play.

Even if everything within our power is done to limit truck movements on the road network servicing the Inner Harbour, the real issue impacting capacity is the growth in passenger vehicles. 90 per cent of the traffic is cars, and their numbers continue to climb. This is a much more challenging issue to address, and it is a problem facing many of the major roads around Perth.

Free information events in September

To find out the real facts about Westport, register now to attend one of our free public events:

- **Kwinana – The Darius Wells Library Resource Centre**
  Tuesday 10 September 2019 – 7.30am-9.00am

- **Perth – Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre**
  Thursday 12 September 2019 – 5.30pm-7.00pm

- **Fremantle – The Esplanade Hotel**
  Wednesday 18 September 2019 – 7.30am-9.00am

- **Cockburn – AMC Jakovich Function Centre**
  Friday 20 September 2019 – 7.30am-9.00am

Nicole Lockwood will give a detailed rundown on how and why the five options on Westport’s shortlist were selected, and a panel of subject matter experts will be on hand to answer all of your technical questions. Register now as tickets are limited.

The Blue Highway

As an unconventional solution, the Blue Highway has attracted a great deal of attention.

There has been an accusation that Westport did not inform stakeholders of this option or properly socialise it with them. This is blatantly untrue as the Blue Highway was the differentiating factor in the long-list’s Fremantle Option 4 from the outset, as depicted in the Westport Beacon 6: Westport’s long-list of options.

Further, all stakeholders who participated in Westport’s MCA-1 workshops were briefed at length about this option and how the Blue Highway would operate to enable them to properly score that option. Other stakeholders were briefed about the Blue Highway in meetings and provided with the long-list’s details in late June 2019.

Westport has also made no secret of the fact that the Blue Highway would involve higher operational costs than other options (this is stated in Westport Beacon 7: Westport’s shortlist). However, the trade-off is that it may require less dredging due to using shallow draught barges. As such, the Blue Highway is being considered more as a transitional option as it would unlikely be cost-effective for the long-term (although this is still being tested).