

Jason Sprott and  
Renee Hovey at the  
United Nations  
headquarters in  
Geneva

# UN hosts port sustainability forum

Paula Wallace reports on the port sustainability forum held recently in Geneva at the UN headquarters

## THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

of Ports and Harbours and the World Port Sustainability Program held a two-day workshop and forum to discuss sustainability in practice.

Jason Sprott and Renee Hovey from Australian consultancy practice Sprott Planning & Environment attended the forum with port colleagues from Europe, Africa, Asia, New Zealand, North and South America.

“Clearly, the landscape has changed and sustainability means so much more than simply a narrow focus on environmental and ecological issues,” Mr Sprott said.

“Our experience in working with Queensland ports is that this is well understood and our clients are seeing the advantage of adopting a whole of business approach”, Ms Hovey said.

“The event... was an ideal forum for a wide range of ports to share information and insights regarding the use of the SDG platform as part of good strategy development.”

Since the launch of the World Port Sustainability Program in March 2018, ports across the globe have been determining what the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals mean for their business and governance. Some ports

are more advanced than others and the meeting in Geneva enabled open discussion on various approaches. In addition, shipping line MSC and financial institution BNP Paribas outlined what sustainability means to them as businesses and what strategies they are pursuing in this area.

## MORE ACTION NEEDED

Representing Ports Australia at the forum, Mr Sprott and Ms Hovey tabled a new publication *Ports and a Sustainable Australia* that highlights sustainability work under way across Australia.

“The document was very well received and highlighted a snapshot of work around the country. We should be very proud of the work under way in Australia across many ports, however there is more work to do, particularly in the areas of ‘front-end’ climate change policy,” Mr Sprott said.

“Whilst our ports are demonstrating commitment to addressing climate change adaptation and resilience, we need to be more active in front-end issues in terms of emission reductions, transition to cleaner fuel types and cleaner operational activities.

“Longer-term aspirational targets are needed throughout our industry. We also need to see robust studies focusing on the

impact of climate change for certain trades and commodity types, as ports will need to adapt.”

## PROGRESS USING SDG PLATFORM

Ports at the forum indicated that they are taking action against the SDG framework, although progress is varied.

“There is a strong commitment to the platform and while there was evidence SDGs are addressed at a ‘project’ level, we expect there will be further contribution to the WSPSP database and it is hopeful there will be additional progress to integrate SDGs at a ‘strategy’ level.” Ms Hovey said.

“The UN recommends businesses evaluate their activities and their current and potential impacts against the SDGs,” explains Mr Sprott, adding that not all SDGs are materially significant to every business.

“Ports are clearly not expected to address all 17 goals and 169 targets,” Ms Hovey said.

In Australia, Queensland ports are taking strong action and undertaking targeted assessments of each SDG as part of strategy development work. Mr Sprott’s company is currently working with all Queensland ports and has just started working with some in New Zealand.

“To us, sustainability can help tell the story of ports very well – capturing a whole range of good historical work and outlining renewed commitments in forward years. This is generally well received by stakeholders including local communities, interest groups and regulators,” Mr Sprott said.

“Ports have an opportunity to lead, and we are encouraged by many ports taking a renewed approach to sustainability.

“Critically, ports should be developing key strategies with both short and longer term targets – ensuring that sustainability is not simply an action list, but rather a whole of business approach with a clear commitment over many years,” Mr Sprott said.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The forum wrapped up with a commitment from the IAPH/WPSP managers to prepare a forward program of events over the next two years.

“It will be exciting to see the forward WPSP program which will help Australian ports work out how they can become more involved and take advantage of the network of colleagues and leading project examples from around the globe,” Ms Hovey said. ■