

HELPING PORTS ACT LOCALLY TO CONTRIBUTE GLOBALLY

Claire Bryant, Future Proof Solutions and **Jason Sprott**, Sprott Planning & Environment, take a look at how materiality assessments can help ports to identify issues that matter the most.

The port industry came together to discuss and share knowledge on port sustainability at the Greenport Congress in Amsterdam in October 2017.

Claire Bryant and Jason Sprott facilitated a workshop with Erik de Deckere from the Port of Antwerp, to further industry learning around key port sustainability issues: Materiality assessments, the relevance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the port sector and sustainability reporting.

All were aligned that port stakeholders are expecting more action from ports on the most important sustainability issues and more information on what is being done to address these must be communicated.

MATERIALITY ASSESSMENTS

Claire Bryant introduced the process of materiality assessments as a key step for a port or terminal operator to systematically identify and prioritise “the issues that matter the most” to its business and stakeholders.

Importantly, and potentially the crux of the process, is that materiality includes input from and active engagement with external stakeholders. As well as helping to understand the sustainability issues of most importance to stakeholders and business, it also forms a framework to explain why certain actions are being taken above others and involvement of stakeholders will mean the chosen actions are more likely to be supported. Beyond this, the process provides a robust platform for reporting to stakeholders.

GLOBAL PLATFORM

Jason Sprott presented a closer examination of the global sustainability platform - the UN SDGs, including key information on their development, scope and key themes (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace & Partnerships). He proposed that if ports wanted to test alignment and shape business strategy against the UN SDG platform (including how well each ‘material issue’ is/is not addressed by the business), a targeted assessment would be required.

Jason provided an overview of the recently in-house developed framework United Nations SDGs & Seaports - assessing relevance & finding opportunities that may help ports understand the SDGs and the relevance to their business and corporate strategy.

The ‘5-step framework’ proposes that whilst every SDG should be considered by ports, it may be useful as a starting point to categorise the likely relevance of each goal.

The SDG presentation also highlighted the substantial work underway in a number of sectors including financial, mining, logistics, food production and telecomms. Clearly, the adoption of the UN SDG framework to test business strategies and corporate reporting is advancing significantly in leading corporate entities

In our view, materiality and the SDGs are complementary. Whilst materiality can help structure business strategy and



■ The UN SDGs

sustainability communications at the local context, the SDGs allow an organisation to refine and calibrate its strategy with the needs of wider society as a global reference point.

Linking with the materiality and SDG presentations, Eric de Deckere from the Port of Antwerp presented recent work by the PIANC working group in sustainability reporting; in particular the work examining a port-specific GRI module.

A particular highlight was the significant work undertaken by the Port of Antwerp with the release of its 2017 Sustainability Report including detailed address of the UN SDGs.

Antwerp adds to the growing number of leading seaports who are incorporating address of the UN SDGs in their corporate reporting documents, a trend that we expect to advance rapidly in the coming years.

So what next for ports? The sustainability agenda is gathering momentum towards incorporating sustainability as an element of business strategy. Aligning corporate strategy and actions with Agenda 2030 (the SDGs) is an important step in the right direction for any port.

We would encourage global ports to consider SDG No. 17 ‘Partnerships, one which encourages collaboration, shared learnings and industry knowledge platforms/portals. In our view, this will be critical to capitalise on the array of sustainability opportunities within the port industry and will help ports determine what they can do locally AND contribute globally.