

STRATEGY for the FUTURE

The Queensland Government is developing future plans to deal with the freight task by increasing funding for the Queensland Transport and Logistics Council (QTLIC). Tim Giles talks to the organisation's Chairman and CEO.

The continuing explosion in the freight task for Australia, particularly in the country's fastest-growing states Western Australia and Queensland, means smart and well planned development of infrastructure and systems is vital to maintain economic growth. The QTLIC is receiving increased support from the state government to develop future strategies and priorities with a high level of involvement on the part of the transport and logistics industry. The increasingly congested nature of south east Queensland, the need to get more and more resources from the mine site to the ship and a lack of well-informed planning in the past, has left the Sunshine State in need of a comprehensive transport and logistics strategy. In the past, priorities and strategies have been set by individual interest groups and government departments. In recent years, the Queensland Government has recognised the need for a holistic approach to planning and development infrastructure in an increasingly crowded state. The QTLIC is funded by both the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) and the Federal Department of Infrastructure and Transport (DIT). The past 18

developed from an ongoing discussion between the transport and logistics industry and TMR.

"A lot has happened in the last 12 months, we have stepped up to a whole other level, as the Americans would say," says QTLIC Chairman Neil Findlay. "There has been a significant funding increase by both the state and federal governments in recognition of the potential they saw in the organisation. They also saw the potential need for what we can offer them. Critically, it is both the states and the federal government who are asking for information from freight councils all around Australia. "We are not just regarded as a source of information, but also as a conduit to get out to the broader industry. It is an industry which government doesn't have a great deal of access to, especially since they privatised their own state owned transport operations."

In the second half of 2011 the Queensland Transport Minister approved enhanced funding for QTLIC. This has enabled them to employ a CEO, Rebecca Michael, whose initial task is to pull together a strategic and operational plan for the QTLIC. This led to the outlining of the strategic aims the QTLIC will be concentrating on over the next two years. Rebecca previously worked for the Local Government Association of Queensland as its principal adviser for Infrastructure,



Rebecca Michael was recently appointed as CEO of the QTLIC.

In her role she worked with freight transport logistics policies. She was actually involved with the QTLIC at an early stage, from the other side of the fence.

"In my previous role I saw the increased focus and new priorities on freight transport," says Rebecca. "From that side,



the QTLC has also developed a Strategic and Operational Plan for the next two years, identifying some key strategic priorities and outlining the Council's role, mission statement and vision.

One of the jobs the QTLC has set itself is to improve the amount of data about the freight and logistics industry in Queensland. Real usable data about what is going on with the freight task in the state is in short supply and better information should lead to better policy. Information about first and last mile access is vital to improve outcomes.

Looking to the future, Queensland needs to know where the next resources booms may happen and what infrastructure will be needed to support them.

Many infrastructure projects now taking place are as a result of either Cyclone Yasi or the floods. Funding is set to bring them back to their original condition. But it may be an opportunity to improve those roads, thus improving access.

Improving specifications on some routes may overcome access restrictions, due to small things like a narrow road shoulder or a bridge in need of strengthening. Spending on infrastructure is always going to be problematic in such a large state as Queensland with most of the population living in the south-east corner. Improvements in outback roads can be relatively expensive when comparing the cost to the amount of daily use they receive. For most

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politicians, spending on infrastructure in highly populated areas is more visible and electorally effective.

“There are a number of groups of regional local councils putting together a freight strategy,” says Rebecca. “They are looking at innovative ways of providing some of the funding to improve roads and other infrastructure. The challenge is to find the equity of investment and the equity of access for all. At the end of the day, there is very little funding to meet a fast-growing freight task.”

The QTLC is also looking at a few more practical, down-to-earth projects to improve the situation for freight transport in the short term. They are sitting down with the NHVR Project Office to assess innovation that can help freight transport now. They are

trailing some aspects of the new rules to see if they will be practical when the national regulator comes into force next year. They are working on setting up an Advanced Fatigue Management trial to get ‘on the ground’ feedback on how it can work. They are also working to help develop the PBS Route Assessment Tool and seeing if a proposed 28 day turnaround on receiving permit applications is practicable.

“This is the start, and this is where we are headed,” says Neil. “This is a very substantial step up from where we were six months ago. Having Rebecca on board means we’ve really been able to step up the liaison with organisations like the NHVR, local government and the livestock transporters. Now we can identify what the issues are, where



saw it as a good opportunity to come in and tighten those things up. As a CEO it is possible for me to bring together a bunch of ideas and give them a focus and direction.

"I could see the QTLC were providing an excellent interface between industry and the government. They were able to temper from both sides and find some common ground and maintain a focus on questions like the kind of productivity outcomes we are seeking." This scenario is being played out all over Australia with road managers fighting to protect the assets they do have and the freight industry looking for more access for more freight. The dichotomy between 'preservation and productivity' can be seen to be repeated in the major freight bottlenecks, like Botany Bay, Port of Melbourne, Great Northern Highway etc. "A lot of our focus over the next two years is centred around things like land use planning, looking at rules and regulations outside of just transport," says Rebecca. "We are looking at the other variables out there which affect freight. It is important to ensure we have maintained corridors, making sure there is state planning policies that support

any freight strategy."

As is the case in many states, Queensland government departments and agencies have come up with a large number of different plans which have different priorities for different industries and areas. One of the roles of the QTLC is to ensure the studies which influence policy-making have taken into account the requirements of transport and logistics, not only in the short term, but also over the current horizon.

The development of an integrated freight strategy for Queensland was completed last year and is the basis of future work for the QTLC. It was not developed in order to solve all the problems but simply to create a context within which solutions to problems could be hammered out.

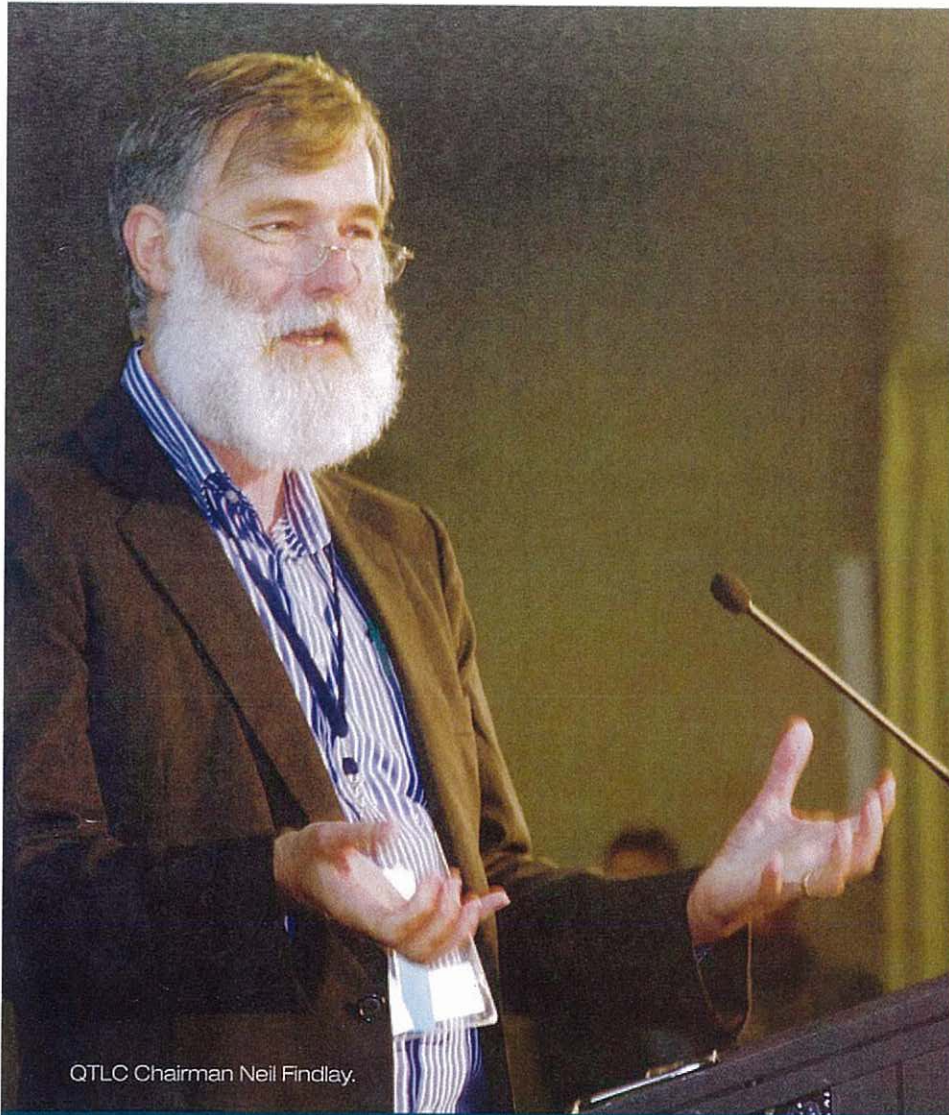
Much of the agenda setting work for the QTLC has been achieved by their three working groups. The Access and Regulation working group has a large involvement with road transport and the issues surrounding permits, classification of routes and improved access for higher productivity vehicles. The second group is Infrastructure and Planning. This has been delving into the infrastructure

paradigm around Queensland and looking across the modal possibilities. Intermodal activities are the interest of the third working group and although this was the last group to be formed, all three are working towards producing draft reports which will make their way to the Minister.

"Fundamentally, these working groups' remit was to provide recommendations from the industry's perspective," says Rebecca. "They are meant to facilitate and enhance the wider freight strategy. The recommendations range all the way from access and regulation reform through to nominating particular infrastructure projects from the freight industry's perspective. There is also a structure set up within TMR and the QTLC for us to be able to monitor that going forward.

"Providing those initial recommendations will then be finished for the working groups. After this we want to change the role so that they become a kind of high-level advisory group to advise the government on particular policies."

Apart from this role of directly advising government in Queensland on priorities for the improvement of freight logistics,



QTLIC Chairman Neil Findlay.

the pinch points are.

"One of the advantages we have is we don't come with any baggage. We don't have a legacy of having tried things which didn't work. We can say, here is a problem, let's attack it and see what solutions we can find."

The QTLIC is now part of the Australian Freight Council Network, a grouping of similar organisations from around Australia. The QTLIC is going to be an active force in taking federal freight transport policy forward.

There is a good deal of discussion to be had about the possibility of an efficient inland rail freight system. If it comes to be, decisions need to be made as to where it will terminate, and how it will service the crowded south-east corner of Queensland and growing industries elsewhere in the state.

The QTLIC will be able to provide the kind of long-term perspective which politicians running the state on a short three year election cycle have difficulty in comprehending. At the same time,

QTLIC is dealing directly with federal and national organisations like Infrastructure Australia and the Department of Infrastructure and Transport in Canberra, bringing a Queensland perspective to policy development and reinforcing the message from other state bodies.

"It's a pretty fast changing environment out there," says Neil. "We have had all three state governments on the east coast change hands recently and that represents quite a quantum shift in the philosophy of those governments. At the QTLIC, we don't have political views but we have to be mindful of the fact that the winds of change are blowing.

"That creates a whole new environment for the freight sector to educate incoming governments and get the view from government back to the freight industry. Our conduit role has to be emphasised quite strongly. We can stand between government and industry to be a facilitator of discussions across multiple governments and multiple agencies. This is now coming together for the QTLIC."

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