

'WORLD IN A BOX'

- THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LAW -

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INTRODUCTION

Looking back over the last 50 years, there can be no doubt that the 1960s was a decade of revolution and counter-culture:

- the increased and open use of recreational and hard drugs
- the emergence of the 'pop-culture' - The Beatles, Rolling Stones....
- the questioning and ridiculing of past values and customs

It was a decade that also saw a revolution in the field of transport:

- the development of the mini-car - mini-minor, mini-cooper
- in Australia and other parts of the world, the dismantling of trolley-bus & tram networks
- rail authorities in Australia & UK sadly replacing steam locomotives with impersonal diesel & electric-powered units
- the introduction of mass-travel with Boeing's Jumbo 747
- the experience of international travel at supersonic speed of the Anglo-French Concorde.

So the emergence of the container sat quite comfortably within this period of revolutionary zeal - it was part of a global progression towards increased economic benefits and greater efficiencies. It also introduced new words into our vocabulary, such as 'containerisation', 'inter-modalism', 'logistics' to name a few.

THE EARLY DAYS

Reference was made in the film tonight to the American Malcolm McLean who, in 1956, transformed containerisation from a concept into reality.

In the early 1960s, whilst a few American shipping lines were introducing containers between Europe and ports on the East Coast of North America, and other trade lanes, individual British and European Lines were carrying out their own research into the introduction of containerisation. All of them came to the same conclusion - no one line had sufficient financial capital to convert their existing services to containerisation with purpose-built tonnage. The answer was for Lines to join together to form a consortium. This enabled the raising of sufficient capital and the pooling of their knowledge and 'know-how' to develop and introduce a revolution.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TWO BRITISH CONSORTIA

In June 1965, it was announced that four long-established British Lines had agreed to form a consortium called Overseas Containers Ltd., referred to by the acronym OCL. The member lines were:

- P&O
- Ocean Transport & Trading,
- British & Commonwealth Shipping
- Furness Withy

And this development was followed in January 1966 by the establishment of a second British consortium calling itself Associated Container Transportation Ltd., and referred to as ACT, whose members were made up of another five equally long-established British Lines:

- Blue Star Line
- Cunard
- Ellerman Lines
- Ben Line
- Harrison Line

OCL announced that the first trade they would containerise would be between UK/Europe and Australia, and ACT made a similar announcement shortly afterwards.

OCL and ACT soon agreed to launch a joint service consisting of OCL's six vessels and ACT's three vessels, programmed in an integrated schedule with each Line sharing slots on each other's vessels. At the time, this arrangement was regarded as 'ground-breaking'!

In 1969, the then Australian Government-owned Australian National Line (ANL), signed a partnership agreement with ACT, and became a partner in this integrated service. ANL also bought one of the ACT vessels. And in so doing, ANL became directly involved in international shipping for the first time.

On a personal note, I joined ACT in London in 1968.

THE FRENETIC YEARS

Between 1966 - 1969 saw the development of a shipping revolution in the trade between UK/Europe and Australia.

Over the span of these three short years, OCL and ACT:

- rewrote the terms of the b/lading to cover Door-to-Door container movements
- introduced computers into the shipping industry for the first time
- ordered the construction of 1000s of containers
- designed and built nine cellular containerships, each of around 1300/1500 teus. At the time, they were the largest purpose-built cellular containerships in the world.
- oversaw the construction of container terminals and inland depots in Europe and Australia

- investigated the possibility of offering shippers marine insurance. This project was eventually abandoned
- liaised with exporters and importers in reviewing and redesigning their loading and unloading facilities at production plants and warehouses.
- arranged feeder services, by sea and rail, in Australia and Europe.
- trained the Consortia's shore-based and sea-going staff.
- consulted in Australia and UK with:
 - Governments, and their custom and quarantine agencies
 - the union movement
 - road and rail providers

THE FILM

The reasons for making this film were four-fold:

- Firstly, to present a permanent commemoration of the 50th Anniversary, which must be considered as one of the major developments in Australian Maritime history.
- Secondly, to highlight the fact that this shipping revolution was successfully introduced along one of the world's longest trade lanes, made longer at the time by the closure of the Suez Canal after the 1967 Egyptian/Israeli War.
- Thirdly, to bring to the general public's attention the role played by containerisation today in our everyday lives
- Fourthly, to acknowledge the developments in containerisation over the past 50 years.

The scale of these developments can be measured by looking at two sets of statistics:

In 1969, the global volume of containers being handled could have numbered in the hundreds of thousands of teus. In 2018, The World Shipping Council's statistics indicate that, during that year, the 50 major ports in the world handled approximately 480 million teus.

And with regards to the capacities of container vessel, as I have already mentioned, the first OCL and ACT vessels had a capacity of around 1,300/1,500 teus. In 2020, container vessels are being built, each with a capacity of up to 24,000 teus. And my research indicates that there are now over 100 container vessels in the trade between Asia and Europe, each with a capacity of over 20,000 teus.

THE PRODUCTION OF THE FILM

Towards the end of 2016, with the 50th Anniversary looming in 2019, I decided that this milestone had to be commemorated in some way.

By chance, one evening in January 2017, I was talking to my next-door neighbour, Tony Eyres, who was also wheeling out his garbage bins in preparation for the council collection the following day. Tony has a wide experience and extensive knowledge in agriculture and food production, and is the Executive Director of his consultancy company, Rounding Up Pty Ltd. From that conversation developed our association with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra. Tony became my Business Associate in this venture, and without him this project would have never got off the ground. My thanks to Tony is beyond measure.

Also in early 2017, I invited John Spurrett, former MD of P&O Containers in Australia, Christopher Cullen, former MD of the ACT Group in Australia and Frank Needs, a senior executive of ANL to join me in forming a small committee to develop this project. I thank these

Gentlemen for their support, particularly in the initial stages which proved so important.

At the beginning of 2018, the Committee was considering placing advertisements in various newspapers as a way to commemorate the 50th Anniversary. But Rod Nairn, CEO of Shipping Australia, was the person who suggested that we forget about advertisements and make a documentary film instead, and I thank Rod for providing me with my 'light-bulb' moment.

After interviewing a couple of film-makers, we appointed Jamie Davies and he, in turn, introduced us to the film producer, Patrick Lindsay. I thank Jamie and Patrick for their extraordinary enthusiasm and professionalism in the making of the film 'World in a Box'.

And I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to our Sponsors and the Presenters who appear in the film.

THE FUTURE

Let us now transport ourselves forward in time. The year is 2069, and at the ripe old age of 121 years, I am asked to produce a sequel film to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the first international container service into Australia. Given the speed of technology now, and the increased speed we can expect during the next 50 years, you can be sure the global shipping scene in 2069 will be unrecognisable compared to the shipping industry we see today.

During the next 50 years:

- will a visionary like Malcolm McLean appear and introduce us to another revolutionary shipping concept?
- what will be the effect of digital transformation upon the shipping industry?
- if there are still containerships plying the trade-lanes in 2069, what will be their size? How will they be powered? Will they be totally controlled by robotics?

- what will the international trading patterns look like? Will Australia be a major exporter of manufactured goods? Will India be the manufacturing engine-room of the world?
- Will Australia's agricultural exports be dominated by plant-based products instead of meat? Will wool be a fibre of the past?
- will the shipping industry become carbon-free?

But whatever the scene may look like in 2069, we in Australia, as an island-nation, will continue to depend on a shipping industry to service our imports and exports that will continue to drive and sustain our economy.

IN CONCLUSION

My appreciation goes to the Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Australia, His Honour James Allsop, for his support and enthusiasm, not

only for the film 'World in a Box', but also his interest in my book 'The Homeward Trade'.

I thank my friend, His Honour Kevin Lindgren, for his support and interest throughout this venture.

And finally my thanks to the President of the Australian Academy of Law, His Honour Alan Robertson, for agreeing to hold this event, and to the Academy's staff for making the necessary arrangements.