

AROUND THE PENINSULA

New port five years away

By Mike Hast

CONSTRUCTION of the first stage of an expanded Port of Hastings would not start for four or five years, says the new head of the board charged with bringing the project to reality, Yehudi Blacher.

Mr Blacher and other members of the authority met for the first time at lunchtime on Wednesday 18 January.

Earlier, they visited the existing facilities at Hastings with Ports Minister Denis Naphthine and Hastings MP Neale Burgess.

On the Esso jetty at Long Island Point, near where the first of three stages will be built, Mr Blacher said Hastings was well suited to become Victoria's second container port within 10 to 13 years.

"There is natural deepwater access from Bass Strait, a port already here, and a large area of land already set aside for port development," he said.

Ports were critical elements of modern economies, he said.

He was "absolutely confident" the expansion could be finished on time and on budget, but could not say how much it would cost. "There is extensive planning work to be done."

Mr Blacher said it was a big and exciting project, and there was a great advantage to starting the planning well before construction started in four to five years.

The Port of Melbourne was the most significant container port in Australia, and expansion at Hastings would keep Melbourne at the forefront of national



Place for a port: Ports Minister Denis Naphthine is interviewed by a television news reporter on Esso's jetty at Long Island Point. On the left is Hastings MP Neale Burgess and Dr Naphthine's chief of staff Phil Connole. At right is Yehudi Blacher, chairman of the new Port of Hastings Development Authority board.

exports and imports, he said.

Dr Naphthine said Mr Blacher brought a wealth of experience to the board and had served as a "senior public servant under Coalition and Labor governments for more than 20 years, including roles as the secretary for the Department of Planning and Community Development, and Department for Victorian Communities".

Dr Naphthine said the meeting brought together "the highly experienced team for the first time and would help set the agenda for the way forward, and had instilled a great level of confidence for the future of the project".

The minister said Hastings would serve the state for 50 to 100 years. "This is a nation-building project."

"Container movements are estimated

to quadruple over the next 30 years and it is critical that we begin planning for this growth now.

"The port authority's first task will be to begin the key social, economic and environmental studies that will underpin this important project."

When it started operating, one million TEUs would be moved each year, rising to two or three million after that,

Dr Naphthine said. (A TEU, or twenty-foot equivalent, is a measure of capacity in container transportation as containers come in many sizes.)

Dr Naphthine said a challenge facing the Port of Hastings Development Authority board was freight and logistics.

The board would work with the government's Department of Transport to get the right mix of road and rail transport, he said.

Neale Burgess said 4000 jobs would be created when all three stages were operating.

The figure comes from a 2009 study prepared for the previous, Labor government by the Port of Hastings Corporation, which was disbanded in 2010.

"One of the most important roles of a state government is to create jobs," he said.

An expanded port would bring jobs and money into the community, he said.

Mr Burgess conceded some people would be nervous about the effect on the Western Port environment of an expanded port.

Dr Naphthine said the channel in Western Port to the stage one site between the Esso and BlueScope jetties was 14.3 metres. "There will be a little bit of dredging needed near the quays," he said.

The state government this year will ask the federal government for money for Hastings port.