

## McGowan's port in a storm



PAUL MURRAY

### Spin doctors the winners from flawed Cockburn harbour policy

If you've got a good idea, it's a good idea to sell it hard. And if it's not such a good idea, you might have to really go for broke to convince people that it isn't a complete dud.

Like the dud idea to replace a working port — having plenty of excess capacity and an expected lifespan of several decades — with one in an environmentally sensitive location costing \$6 billion you can't afford.

Figures released in State Parliament last week show that the McGowan Government's Westport taskforce has spent \$640,000 on spin-doctoring. The polite term used was marketing and communications.

That is a reasonably big bite from the \$10.7 million taxpayers have already forked out for the taskforce's operations — about \$6 million for supplies and services and the rest on wages.

No political realist would ever have expected the taskforce to do other than recommend a new port at Kwinana. That was its job.

But the future of Fremantle port remains unclear.

Even though the taskforce presented its final report to the Government in March, no decision on the inner harbour and timing of the proposed Kwinana port is expected for two months.

The taskforce has been good news for some in the business community who picked up work, like PricewaterhouseCoopers (\$877,000), Arup (\$705,000), Ambrosia Consulting (\$346,000), Deloitte Access Economics (\$276,000), KPMG (\$166,000) and Dr Richard Walley's Aboriginal Productions and Promotions (\$97,000).

After PwC and Arup, the biggest payment was \$588,000 to Lockwood Advisory, the consultancy of Westport chair Nicole Lockwood.

The spinners as big winners were Labor favourite Daniel

Smith's CGM Communications (\$124,000), Hunter Communications (\$101,000) and Mills Wilson (\$70,000).

Environmental consultants didn't fare as well, other than BMT (\$248,000), which did a study on flushing and water circulation and the potential impacts of dredging a deeper channel into Cockburn Sound.

UWA's Marine Science Institution received \$71,000 to investigate the effects of the dredging. Other environmental consultants were: Le Provost Environmental (\$33,000), GHD (\$25,000), Spectrum Ecology (\$19,500) and Bamford Consulting (\$15,000).

An environmental bulletin released by Westport last September strangely spoke about the Outer Harbour as an imminent fait accompli.

"Westport will continue to monitor global advancements in port designs and technology to identify innovations that may be suitable and

beneficial for the new Kwinana port," the document said.

"With construction of the port unlikely to commence for at least five years due to the planning and approvals process, and with technology improving exponentially, there may be significant enhancements that become available within that time."

That timing would put the building of a new port into a third Labor term — and that's no certainty. How much more will be spent on an unnecessary concept by then?

And the Westport spinners really got ahead of themselves, even positing how the Environmental Protection Authority might deal with a government hell-bent on wrecking Cockburn Sound.

"Westport is expecting to face intense scrutiny in the lead up to, and as part of, the likely Environmental Impact Assessment process," the bulletin said.

"We have

already started developing a list of environmental research and technical studies to address knowledge gaps that will inform our decision-making processes during the port planning and design stages.

"This should also provide the Environmental Protection Authority and the community with confidence that everything is being done to achieve the best environmental outcomes possible."

The Westport policy came out of political opportunism before the 2017 State election. If Labor was to pitch for green votes by backflipping its previous support for Roe 8 and the Perth Freight Link, it had to argue for an Outer Harbour instead.

The tactic was to harness environmental protests about the project's effect on just 2.4 per cent of wetlands around Bibra Lake and a strip of degraded bush at Coolbellup.

And now it is clear that the price to be paid for "saving" that environment — but not any lives on dangerously congested roads — is Cockburn Sound.

As I pointed out in a column in August, last year, Ports Minister Alannah MacTiernan has long advocated for an Outer Harbour against all credible evidence.

Back in 2007 she was claiming a new port would be needed at Kwinana by 2015 on the basis that Fremantle would have reached its optimal capacity.

However, a study done for Fremantle Ports in 2014 found the existing inner harbour could handle 2.1 million containers annually — three times the current operations — with no replacement necessary until 2055.

It has taken \$10.7 million so far to overturn those conclusions by a group of WA's top infrastructure bureaucrats and leading outside consultants.

But what really changed?



The Westport policy came out of political opportunism before the 2017 State election.

MORE OPINION  
PLUS Alston P50-51



## Buzzword bingo folly may be a pain point in new normal

If you have been a regular videoconference participant, there is a strong possibility you have heard of the latest game craze doing the rounds of our workplaces.

With many workers falling victim to sometimes pointless, frequently frustrating and often unbearably invasive virtual meetings, hundreds of unsuspecting bosses have become fair game in a revamped form of bingo — virtual buzzword bingo or VBB.

Participating in an endless number of virtual meetings can suck the soul out of us.

Equally mind-numbing are jargon-mongering bosses.

GARY MARTIN



They have been "going forward" with plans to "reset" and then "pivot" their business by "hitting the ground running" through regular "thought showers" (formerly known as brainstorming) to establish some form of "new normal", which will end up "future-proofing" things.

Enter VBB — a "win-win" situation for workers who can "add value" to their videoconference meetings with

no apparent harm being done to bosses who will remain "out of the loop".

VBB works like a covert form of regular bingo.

Corporate jargon such as "punch the puppy", "workshop it", "smash it", "move the goalposts", "synergy" and "game plan" is written on a series of grid-like electronic forms.

Before the meeting, the game's leader "pings" an email to each player with a different electronic VBB card — a dangerous practice, particularly if the boss becomes suspicious.

Unlike the regular game,

there is no shouting out "bingo". Instead, players agree in advance on an alternative sign such as coughing and clearing of throats along with raising eyebrows.

VBB is like "playing with fire" and getting caught out could damage or destroy a career.

Instead, try to seek comfort by better understanding why bosses and some colleagues continue to babble away.

Many bosses use organisational twaddle to put a spin on so-called "pain points" that they want played down.

Rather than talking about laying off staff, they might

talk about "rightsizing", "de-layering" or "downsizing". Some use jargon to show their importance.

Others use jargon simply to gain acceptance or to "fit in".

Nonetheless, it is best to ditch VBB.

Instead, choose to occasionally "leverage" the odd piece of gobbledegook to bring a "bleeding-edge" advantage to your career. And "incentivise" others to use plain language.

Professor Gary Martin is Australian Institute of Management WA chief executive officer