

Today's Modern Port

The 1990s saw the start of an economic boom for the Goldfields-Esperance Region that required new infrastructure to be developed at the Port to handle increased grain shipments, nickel concentrate, iron ore and, more recently, products for BHP Billiton's Ravensthorpe nickel project.

In 1993 the Port Authority constructed a new bulk minerals loader on Berth Two to handle nickel concentrate from Outokumpu's Forresteria mine. This led to the nickel shipments being reintroduced through the Port 15 years after WMC had ceased exports because of the construction of the Kalgoorlie Nickel Smelter. Other nickel producers followed with exports from Mt Keith starting in 1995, Black Swan (1997), and Cosmos and Emily Anne (2001).

The new bulk minerals loader was built following a decision by the Federal and State governments in 1993 to jointly fund a \$16.5 million upgrade of the Esperance to Leonora railway that enabled Portman Mining to ship iron ore from its Koolyanobbing operations through Esperance to Asian markets.

By 1994 when the first wagons were rolling into the Port, a shed had been built to store the iron ore and protect the town's beaches from dust, and a rotary car dumper and fully enclosed conveyor system had been installed to handle the iron ore.



**Esperance
Port
Authority**

The information and photographs in this newsletter came from Port records and the Esperance Museum.

The Port thanks the Museum for their assistance.

For further information contact the Port Authority on 9072 3333.

Published August 2006.



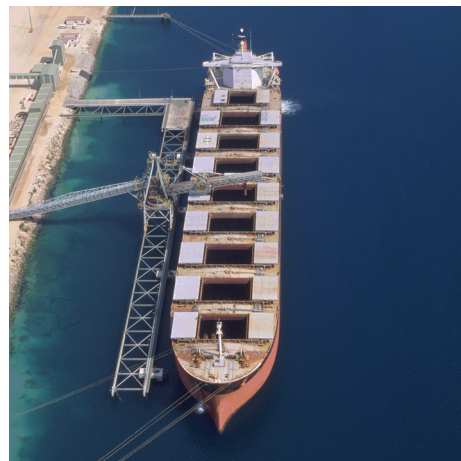
Above: A recent photograph of today's modern Port. Below: A Cape Class ship loads iron ore alongside Berth Three.

In 1999, CBH committed to a major upgrade of their grain export terminal at the Port. CBH spent \$68 million on new grain silos, conveyors and shiploading circuit capable of loading Panamax Class ships at a rate of up to 2400 tonnes an hour.

When Portman announced an increase in its iron ore exports in 2000, it was the catalyst for a \$54 million upgrade at the Port that included -

- dredging alongside Berths One and Two to increase the depth from 12.8 metres to 14.5 metres to enable Panamax Class vessels to load up to 70,000 tonnes of cargo;
- building a dolphin berth alongside the breakwater and dredging the harbour basin and alongside the new berth to 19 metres to enable the Port to handle Cape Class ships to 200,000 tonnes;
- installing a shiploader capable of loading iron ore at the rate of 4500 tonnes an hour;
- reclaiming 23 hectares of land to enable iron ore sheds to be built and provide land for future development; and
- building a 300,000 tonne iron ore storage and handling facility on the reclaimed land.

To handle BHP Billiton's products for the Ravensthorpe Nickel Project the Port is acquiring a shore-based gantry crane to be installed on Berth Two in 2007,



developing a 120,000 tonne sulphur storage facility on the reclaimed land, and installing container handling and storage facilities. The cost of this infrastructure is \$31 million.

BHP Billiton will import 500,000 tonnes of sulphur and 40,000 tonnes of magnesium oxide annually for its process plant and will export up to 200,000 tonnes of nickel hydroxide in containers a year.

Esperance Port is now preparing to handle woodchips from 2008. Integrated Tree Cropping plans to start exporting up to 300,000 tonnes of woodchips through Esperance by 2010, with an initial target of 100,000 tonnes a year.

Such has been the development at the Port that records show that in 1990 640,579 tonnes of cargo was handled, a figure that reached a record 8,309,163 tonnes at the end of the 2005-06 financial year.



Esperance PORT 1864 - Today

Sailing Ships and Settlement

Esperance was named after the French frigates *Esperance* and *Recherche* sheltered from a storm in the lee of what is today known as Observatory Island. That was in 1792. The expedition, under the command of Antoine D'Entrecasteaux, named local landmarks including the Recherche Archipelago, Cape Le Grand, Mondrain and Remarque islands and Esperance Bay.

Explorer Matthew Flinders saw significant hope for the area and raised the British flag near here in 1802 while he was mapping the coast of Australia, but it wasn't until the early 1860s that the four Dempster brothers, Charles, Edward, Andrew and James, were granted 304,000 acres of land that boasted "more grass than they had seen anywhere between Esperance and Northam". They settled here in 1864.

The Dempsters initially brought sheep, cattle and horses overland from Northam to stock their property, but in 1866 they shipped stock to Esperance from South Australia. The brothers built Esperance's first landing, but only one ship made the Adelaide to Esperance voyage in the first year, and for a number of years it was the Dempster's cutter "Gypsy" and Captain Fred Douglas' coastal schooners "Agnes" and "Grace Darling" that provided the only shipping service to the lonely outpost.

Once other adventurers started taking up land on the Esperance coastal plain a small settlement developed that was an important link in the Overland Telegraph between Albany and Eucla that was completed in 1877.

By 1880 the locals centred their lives around the Dempster Homestead and telegraph office, but their only contact with the outside world was with the sailing ships that stopped while travelling between Adelaide and Albany to deliver mail and supplies and pick up wool.

Wool was shipped out and food and mail landed at Dempster's landing, but ships came so rarely that the Postmaster put a lamp in the post office window on the night a ship arrived to signal that there was mail to collect.

While a privately owned jetty was built by the Hampton Plains company at Newtown and a narrow gauge tramway connected the jetty to the settlement two miles



Grace Darling - a regular early visitor to Esperance Bay.

away, the company failed and the jetty was open to the elements and soon fell into disrepair. (Today, the remains of this jetty are still seen on Castletown beach.)

The discovery of gold to the north of the town saw Esperance named as the "gateway to the Goldfields" with as many as 400 miners arriving on one ship forced to sleep on the seaweed on the beach because of a lack of accommodation, and then to walk to the Dundas, Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie goldfields because there was no rail or road transport.

The goldrush brought with it shipping disasters such as the SS Rodondo sinking with 200 men on board who were heading for the Goldfields, a large boiler on deck being blamed for affecting the ship's compass. The Grace Darling was involved in the rescue of many of these men.

The increase in the number of ships bringing men and machinery for the Goldfields led to a demand for the State Government to act on local infrastructure and provide the town with a public jetty.



The steamer Penguin was a frequent visitor to Esperance in the early years. Dempster Head is in the background.

First One Jetty, Then Two

1895 has been described as a turning point in the fortunes of Esperance with the town being gazetted as a municipality and the first jetty being built where the James Street groyne is today.

The initial jetty - known as the Town Jetty - was about 500 feet long (150 metres) and had a seaward depth of 10 feet (three metres), but was suitable only for berthing shallow drafted vessels, many of which ended up aground at low tide when fully laden. Most people, cargo and animals were still landed at the jetty from ships anchored in deeper water.

Persistent pleas to the State Government to improve the harbour facilities, as well as establish a road and rail link between the Port and Norseman, resulted in the Town Jetty being extended.

In 1896 the Government paid to extend the jetty to 2870 feet (857 metres), which included a head of 330 feet (100 metres), room enough to berth four ships at a time. While the water depth at the end was 18 feet (5.5 metres), by 1897 locals were again calling for further upgrades to the jetty or for a new one to be built after two steamers went aground while tied up alongside.

Building materials, mining equipment and provisions for the Goldfields were shipped



The Town Jetty extension - completed in 1898.

into Esperance and hauled by horse and camel teams to the north.

After visiting the town in 1898 Premier John Forrest promised to build a railway line between Esperance and the Goldfields, but because of a perceived threat that Adelaide merchants would steal Goldfields trade from Fremantle merchants via the Esperance Port, Norseman was connected by rail to the Goldfields and Fremantle, but the line wasn't extended to Esperance.

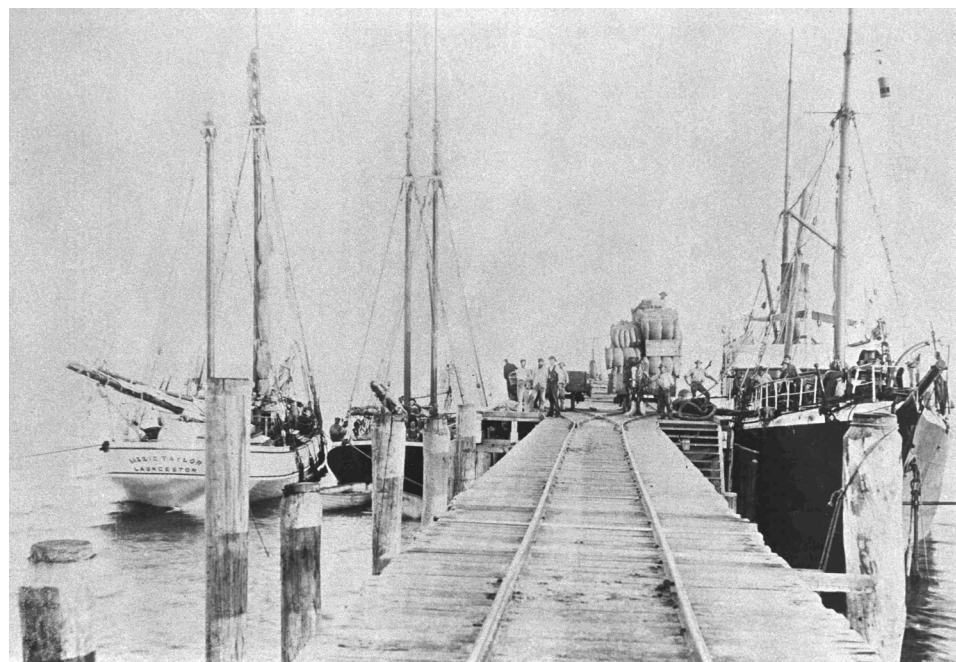
By 1908 the population of Esperance had dwindled and the town ceased to be a municipality and for the ensuing years the region's trade came through Fremantle.

Esperance's fortunes changed again with the opening of the Mallee for agriculture in the 1920s. After a rail link had been established between Salmon Gums and the Esperance Port in 1925 the wheat harvest rose from 1471 tons that year to 4376 tons in 1929 and more than 15,608 tons two years later. In 1931 nearly 200,000 bags of wheat were shipped from the town jetty along with salt and wool.

By the 1930s bulk fuel storage facilities had been installed in Esperance after diesel power was introduced on the Goldfields, and when wheat exports topped the half million bushel mark there were renewed calls for the upgrading of the facilities at the Esperance Harbour.

In 1934 work started on the Deepwater Wharf at Hannett's Point, and was completed in March 1935 at a cost of 70,000 pounds (\$140,000). The jetty was 2747 feet long (820 metres), 48 feet wide (14 metres) at the head, and had a depth of 36 feet (11 metres) at the seaward end.

Today the Deepwater Wharf is known as the Tanker Jetty.



The original Town Jetty was only 150 metres long.

Vision Becomes Reality

The newly elected member for Kanowna Emil Nulsen showed imaginative foresight in his maiden speech to State Parliament in 1932 when he saw the most important subject affecting his constituency as the need for a harbour and land-backed berths at Esperance. The seat of Kanowna covered the Goldfields and Esperance.

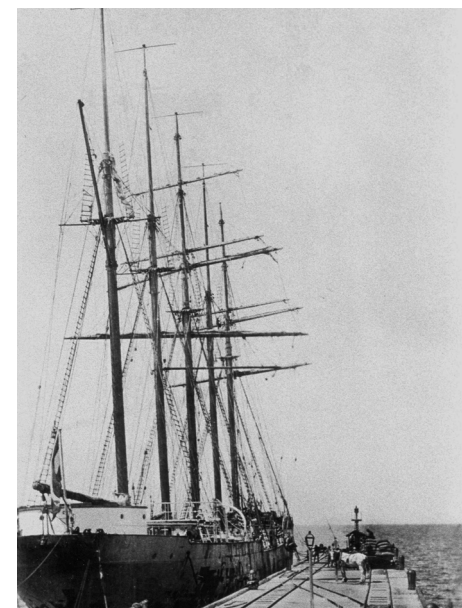
Mr Nulsen outlined how economic and social progress had been retarded because of the crippling cost of freight to his isolated electorate and the inability of large ships to berth at the Town Jetty because of their draft.

His concern was further prompted by the significant increase in Mallee grain production and the lack of facilities to handle the increase.

While the Deepwater Wharf was completed in 1935, the jetty was open to ocean swell, the water at the seaward end was not deep enough to berth modern ships and the jetty was unsuitable for handling bulk cargo.

Esperance was in the news in 1949 when research showed that the Esperance Coastal Plain - an area extending 350 km east and west of the town and 50 km to the north - could be transformed into good pasture land by the use of fertilisers and trace elements.

But it was not until the 1960s that two developments occurred that gave impetus



Sailing ship Carl Vinnen berthed at the Town Jetty.



The Deepwater Wharf, the old Town Jetty and the first land-backed berth being developed in the foreground.

to the development of today's Port: firstly, large tracts of the Esperance sandplain were open for agriculture and the town attracted national publicity when American investors established landholdings. The success of their farming methods attracted farmers to the area from throughout Australia.

And then Western Mining Corporation found nickel at Kambalda.

These sudden and extensive developments, along with increased exports of grain, salt from Lake Lefroy near Widgiemooltha, and live sheep, and increased imports of fuel and superphosphate, required modern Port facilities capable of handling large volumes of bulk cargo.

Work started on a land-backed wharf in 1962 and the first berth was opened by the then Premier of Western Australia, Sir David Brand on November 19, 1965. Built at a cost of more than 1.3 million pounds (\$2.6 million), the project included the construction of a 3425 feet long breakwater (1140 metres) and the dredging of the inner basin and entrance channel.

In 1967, nickel concentrate from Western Mining's operations was first shipped from the land-backed berth and live sheep were first exported in 1971.

In 1974 the standard gauge railway was completed, linking Esperance Port to the national rail system, making Esperance unique among WA's regional ports. Ship loading facilities and storage areas were upgraded to handle the increased tonnages of bulk materials coming into the Port by rail and a 3km pipeline installed from Berth Two to the fuel tank farm, located near the Tanker Jetty.

In 1968, the Esperance Port Authority was formed to take over the running of the Port from the Department of Harbour and Lights, and the second land-backed berth was completed in 1972, seven years after the opening of the first berth. By then there was talk of a third berth.

In 1988 the Port was deepened from 11 metres to 12.8 metres to enable 50,000 tonne ships to berth and load bulk cargo. Up until then, ships of between 30,000 and 35,000 tonnes were limited because of the depth alongside the berths and had to sail to Albany to complete their loading.

The deepening of the harbour and the ability of Esperance Port to load the large ships resulted in significant savings.

In 1970 the Port handled 623,000 tonnes of cargo in 69 vessels, a figure that increased to 1.4 million tonnes in 68 vessels in 1989.