



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

OPINION

We can preserve the Ports, and clean the air, for California's future

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As a representative of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) – 15,000 workers who keep cargo moving at the nation's busiest ports, and as a Vice-President of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association (PMSA), which represents maritime employers, we share a different vision of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (Ports) than regulators from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD).

We see the Ports as economic engines that provide vital jobs and necessary consumer goods to the people of this nation. More specifically, 32% of all imports come through the Ports and 19% of all exports leave from this gateway to destinations worldwide. California has the world's 4th largest economy, due in large part to the economic activity derived from these coastal assets. Throughout its history, the Ports have also worked diligently to reduce emissions, with some categories reduced by up to 97% from 2005 levels. While further reductions are needed, no other industrial sector has reduced emissions as effectively, while experiencing economic growth.

Alternatively, SCAQMD staff is advocating for an Indirect Source Rule (ISR) for the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. An ISR is a novel concept where the SCAQMD, responsible for regulating stationary sources of pollution, is attempting to hold the Ports and each individual terminal operator responsible for the pollution of all visiting ships, drayage trucks, cargo handling equipment, trains, harbor craft, etc. Most sources are outside the SCAQMD's direct control.

Furthermore, we do not believe the Ports represent a single source of pollution, but instead reflect thousands of actors working together to keep imports and exports flowing. A system where ILWU members, as well as their employers and other supply chain partners, play a crucial role as stakeholders in the local, regional, state, and national economies.

Objectively, the port complex is functioning as it was intended by California's leadership and as stated in the California Coastal Act. To preserve California's magnificent coastline, our leaders concentrated port facilities, rather than having smaller ports scattered all along California's Coast. Simply put, our local port terminals were pushed into one location – San Pedro Bay– and thousands of families moved here for the good-paying jobs that resulted, ours included.

Historically, the Ports have hosted ship building and repair, fishing, canning, as well as a naval shipyard. Unfortunately, nearly all those associated jobs are now gone. The only activity remaining that supports middle-class forming union jobs is the supply chain. If we lose these jobs as well due to any reason, including forced cargo diversion or excess regulation, thousands of other supply chain and manufacturing jobs will vanish as well.

It is essential for the ILWU and for the communities surrounding the Ports that California achieve a balance between economic justice and environmental justice, something we like to call ENVECO Justice. It does none of us any good to clean the air if, in the process, we lose good-paying jobs. So, when we hear that the SCAQMD, at its senior-most staff levels, doesn't care about jobs or greenhouse gas reduction, these callous statements make our blood boil.

While the SCAQMD has delayed the Ports ISR because of public outcry, we strongly encourage them to abandon rule making for the Ports altogether. We suggest they set the ISR aside in favor of a negotiated Memorandum of Understanding, akin to those negotiated with railroads and airports.

Ultimately, we share the same goals with the broader community, shippers, and regulators alike. We support cleaner air and we've proven we can get there by working together. We will reach a better resolution by collaborating, when thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic impact for Port communities, California and the United States are at stake.

We have an opportunity – if regulators choose to take it.

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