

# Ports security claimed in line with best in world after query

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SECURITY measures in place at Australia's ports are in line with stringent standards implemented in the US in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks, according to maritime security experts.

As bikie gang related violence escalated over the past month, some raised concerns about a connection between gang violence, organised crime and maritime precincts.

The federal opposition had seized on claims by the Australian Crime Commission that bikie gangs were drug running on Australian wharves.

The claims follow similar concerns raised last year about the number of stevedores with criminal connections – a suggestion promptly slammed by unions at the time.

But former port security manager at Sydney Ports Corporation Peter Shepherd argued that the introduction of the International Ship & Port Facility Security Code (ISPS), which required a tightening of security, meant Australian ports were now on par with countries such as the US.

Implemented in 2004 in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks and bombing of the French oil tanker *Limburg*, the ISPS laid down require-

ments for port facilities including security plans, personnel and equipment.

"Ports have responded to that," Mr Shepherd, cofounder and a director of maritime consultants Hatamoto, said.

After touring and observing six ports in the US, Mr Shepherd came to the conclusion that there were no significant differences between security measures implemented in Australia and the US.

"I did not see anything different or anything that was significantly improved. It would appear that in Australia, the assets that are guarding ports are similar in structure to the US. Australia is not highly ahead of the game or behind the game," he said.

While the US had dedicated port police, Mr Shepherd said such duties were carried out just as effectively in Australia.

New South Wales, for example, had the services of the Marine Area Command.

David Anderson, executive director of Ports Australia, did not see any need for the introduction of port police in Australia, describing recent debates on the issue as a "knee jerk reaction."

Closer analysis of the crime com-

mission's report shows that the reference was not specific to wharves, but the maritime industry in general, he said.

"The ports are in very good shape and in a security sense our ports are fairly trouble free," Mr Anderson said, adding that he also believed Australian ports were comparable to those overseas.

Australia's maritime security measures were described as "strong" by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

"The primary focus of the maritime security regime is reducing the risk of a terrorist attack," a spokesman for the department said.

"The Australian government has established a robust preventative security regime which aims to safeguard Australia's maritime transport system and offshore facilities from terrorism."

Steps taken by Australian ports to improve security included investment in hardware such as cameras, fencing and screening facilities, Mr Anderson said.

"There has been considerable investment in security as a result of terrorism. It has enable ports to manager their assets better," he said.