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Freight Alchemy in Australia... Air Freight into Sea Freight

With an unprecedented demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as other medical and community protection material during the COVID-19 crisis, the international freight forwarding industry in Australia, being a member economy of FIATA – with severely limited or in some cases no airline service to Australia – has been put in a position faced by many of its industry counterparts around the world with the plea “*just make it happen*”.

Given the respective shipping services that continued into Australia on scheduled sailings, the international freight forwarder put into operation the many years of industry experience in making the impossible possible. No charts, tables or algorithms could provide an outcome in the current environment, so it was the inordinate skill of the service provider that delivered on the challenge.

In the past, schedule reviews and a few phone calls to airlines and shipping lines that had led to easy answers now morphed into many hours of verification, cross verification, and then reverification. This was done to establish the first principles of operational patterns, capability, availability, and cost-operational opportunities as to immediacy in supply of medical goods. With airfreight out of Europe being available to Singapore, but with then little or no high-capacity airfreight uplift to Australia, an alternate delivery mode needed consideration. There was the sea freight option with capacity and frequency and for the high yield airfreight using capacity of sea freight to Australia. This then led to the sea freight option with existing capacity and frequency where high yield airfreight became high yield sea freight.

All seems easy, just transfer one to the other, but customs-controlled movement of freight usually operates within the same mode of carriage. Therefore, the air to sea freight required a different transit customs control dimension. In addition, for Australian-bound sea freight from Europe, there is a biosecurity risk at this time of the year from the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug which requires container fumigation. Should the container be fumigated, however, all the medical and PPE would then be rendered not fit for purpose. Thus, the process had to be agreed between regulators, mapped and dispensation determined. Furthermore, Australian government approvals as to the goods being fit for purpose and meeting specific health regulations needed to be fast tracked, as the supplier was not registered with Australian regulators for such in the Australian market.

So, the freight forwarder embarked on what in the end would become a template and work process for future European shipments over Singapore, with the appropriate national regulatory agencies agreeing the movement of the freight while meeting the compliance issue. Hours of calls and emails resulted in the beginning of the successful transfer of airfreight to sea freight in the logistic chain and the delivery of vital medical and other equipment into the Australian community.

This is but one of the many examples of the *essential service* delivery of the international freight forwarding industry as to meeting the existing crisis and participating in for the long-term recovery of economies and international trade FIATA and its members are committed to this challenge. For more, visit the FIATA COVID-19 dedicated webpage: www.fiata.com/covid_19.html.