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Ports sailing into years of upgrading

THE state's maritime gateways are changing tack into a new era under the Flinders Ports banner.

Six months after the privatisation of seven South Australian ports, chief executive Vincent Tremaine has written a comprehensive, five-year business plan to upgrade them.

At the top of the list is a proposal to increase storage for cargoes bound for container shipping through the Port of Adelaide.

Flinders Ports also has made proposals to the State Government for a \$45 million grain berth at Pelican Point, at the mouth of the Port River - part of its contractual obligations in its takeover of the SA Ports Corp.

Mr Tremaine said yesterday there was a strong need to better service the motor vehicle export facilities at the Outer Harbour, particularly with the revived export aspirations of Mitsubishi and Holden.

The container-loading area was "totally unsatisfactory" as was the common-user berth and loading and storage facilities for other users, including livestock, fertiliser, mineral sand and stock feed. Mr Tremaine already is dreaming of getting into deeper water.

"It's absolutely essential we deepen the container berth (at the Outer Harbour) to 14m before any further deepening occurs in Melbourne," he said. "It would be a disaster for this state if importers and exporters had to pay a premium to go through Melbourne."

The proposed dredging of channels, expected to cost \$60 million, would be presented to the Government after an economic analysis. The seven ports - Thevenard, Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Port Pirie, Wallaroo, Port Giles and the Port of Adelaide - were sold on November 1 by the former state government for \$190 million to Flinders Ports, a consortium of five main shareholders led by French company Groupe Egis and Adsteam Marine.

Staff was quickly reduced to 90 positions from 140 but three business development officers have since been appointed. "Our operating philosophy is very much focused on delivering the full range of services to customers - covering the broad chain of logistics activities," Mr Tremaine said.

This included towage, pilotage and other ship-handling, dockside and berthing facilities through to cargo handling and other stevedoring services, storage and transfer to road and rail networks. "If we think there is a link in the chain that is not as good as it should be, we may step in ourselves or facilitate someone else," Mr Tremaine said.

Upgrading of facilities at Wallaroo and Port Giles is proceeding in a bid to lift volumes and berthing services to grain-growing areas of SA.