

New port Bonaire: lower costs but nature and benefits require attention

A new cargo port on Bonaire will result in lower transport costs. But there are no guarantees about whether these lower costs will also reduce the cost of living of island residents. And further research is also needed into the effects on nature in the region. These were the findings of a report published today by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB).

The Public Entity Bonaire (OLB) had asked the CPB to examine the social cost-benefit analysis (SCBA) that had been conducted for the planned Cargo Port Bonaire. During this second opinion, the CPB reviewed to what extent the SCBA offers a good insight into the costs and benefits of various alternatives.

At this moment in time, cargo vessels and cruise ships both moor at the quays in the centre of Kralendijk, which is the capital of Bonaire. Furthermore, extra transshipment in Curaçao is needed in order to transport containers to Bonaire. This results in longer delivery times and higher costs. The SCBA examines two new locations for handling freight transport: the site of Water Energie Bedrijf (WEB) and the site of oil storage firm BOPEC, which was declared bankrupt in 2021.

Impact on nature

Researchers from the CPB noticed that the new port has certainly had an impact on the speed with which containers reach Bonaire. There has also been a decrease in transport costs. According to the CPB, the impact on nature, and in particular the physical effects on biodiversity and the coral in the Caribbean Sea, require a more detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (MER). When doing so, it must also be examined if and how the consequences can be mitigated or compensated.

Cost of living

Exactly who will benefit from the lower transport costs is not yet clear, says the CPB. It remains to be seen if the inhabitants of Bonaire will benefit due to lower retail prices, or whether the savings will flow straight to the involved companies. The CPB says that this will be determined by how much competition there is for freight transport to the island, and what kind of new policy is agreed by the OLB with regard to the port and the free market. The CPB states that agreements about port policy and the free market must play a very explicit role in decisions relating to a new port, and not only afterwards.