

## Protecting North Queensland's Environment NQCC Conservation Priorities for 2017

The environment is the key to this election, as it always has been the key to the long-term health and prosperity of our region. NQCC is calling on all candidates in the forthcoming State election to commit to securing our futures by protecting the environment on which we all depend – all species and all future generations.

With every passing day the world, Queensland, and North Queensland in particular, grow more and more aware, not least through cyclones, droughts, floods, tumbling heat records and the death of vast areas of the coral reefs on our doorstep, that we cannot continue to use fossil fuels, particularly when clean and renewable energy is so readily available.

NQCC has three conservation priorities for Queensland in 2017.

### Stop Adani and transition rapidly to renewables

The proposed Adani mine would be the largest coal mine in Australia and the largest export coal mine in the world. It would usher in at least four other massive coal mines, locking in over 100 million tons of climate changing, reef and reef jobs destroying, coal production - every year for the next 60 years. An unlimited water licence has been granted, with some 355 billion litres of water expected to be taken from local rivers and the Great Artesian Basin. The Adani project would slow the desperately needed transition to renewables underway globally and in North Queensland. Here, the solar capital of Australia, some 26 renewable projects are in train in our region, generating well over 1,000 jobs and growing.

This unbankable project will never proceed on a purely commercial basis. Only with massive tax-payer support will this privately owned port, railway and mine project proceed.

NQCC calls for the following from all parties and all candidates:

- Veto the \$1 Billion NAIF concessional loan to Adani and redirect these funds into sustainable projects such as renewables, health and education.
- Withdraw all other public subsidies to Adani, including royalty postponements.
- Engage seriously in implementing a just transition for thermal coal mine workers.

### Land clearing

The government's own SLATS (Statewide Landcover and Trees Study) [report for 2016/17](#) found that last year we cleared 395,000 hectares of trees, putting us on a par with Brazil. This is one-third above the previous year and way above averages in this state for many years across multiple governments. Much of this clearing (40%) was in reef catchments, increasing run-off, erosion and sediment loads, and stressing an already highly threatened reef. Government funding to manage the reef and reef catchments at the same time as allowing massive land clearing in reef catchments makes no sense.

But it's not just trees. Recently, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) found that [34 million animals die every year](#) as a result of land clearing in the State. Clearing is the greatest near-term threat to native species in Australia today, and Australia is in the top seven countries for species extinctions in the world, the only developed country on this list.

NQCC is part of the *Queensland Land Clearing Alliance* and, with our partners, call on all parties and candidates to support stronger land clearing laws and to invest in a forward-looking solution to land protection and regional development.

- Permanently protect all old-growth and all other high conservation value native woodlands and forests under relevant legislation and regulatory instruments.
- Remove “Self-Assessable Codes” for land clearing.
- Ensure strong monitoring and resourcing for the enforcement of land clearing laws.
- Improve mapping for vegetation and halt exemptions via property maps.
- Allocate at least \$300 million over a three-year period to fund ecological carbon projects that meet the dual objectives of sequestering carbon and restoring biodiversity and landscape health, while providing a substantial economic boost to regional Queensland.
- Commit to prompt, transparent and regular (minimum annual) release of clearing data and reporting on impacts.

## Townsville Port Expansion

Despite 2013 Port forecasts of massive future growth<sup>1</sup>, trade at the Port of Townsville has fallen to its lowest level in 23 years. The last time trade was lower than it was last year was in 1994/95. This was not a one-off; trade at the port has fallen year on year since 2011-12, when it was 12.9 million tons. In 2016-17 trade was just 53% of that (6.9 million tons). The Townsville Enterprise Limited CEO has stated that without government support of the Townsville-Mt Isa rail, port trade is expected to halve.<sup>2</sup> It is evident that the Port expansion is completely unnecessary. However, the dredging associated with the proposed development would place huge pressure on the waters and marine life of Cleveland Bay and beyond.

To keep the expanded port open, annual maintenance dredging would increase by around 17% to 450,000 cubic metres<sup>3</sup> a year. All of this maintenance dredge spoil would be dumped in the ocean about half way between Cape Cleveland and Magnetic Island.

Science, historical reports, photos, local knowledge and prevailing weather and tidal patterns support the fact that this highly mobile dredge spoil ends up on Magnetic Island beaches and damages fringing coral reefs and marine life. Cumulative impacts are already in evidence. At a broader level it adds yet further pressure on our much-suffering Great Barrier Reef.

NQCC calls on all parties and candidates to:

- Review the cost benefit for the proposed expansion, in the light of the real demand for the port and the wider channel and the impact on the GBRWHA and local marine environment
- Identify and require use of maintenance dredge locations that minimise the impact on the local marine environment and the waters of the region.

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<sup>1</sup> The expansion proposal was based on the Port’s forecasts provided in its 2013 Environmental Impact Statement. They anticipated that trade would be 25 million tonnes (Mt) by last year, 33.45 Mt by 2024/25 and 48 Mt by 2039/40. Instead, last year the Port traded just 6.91 million tonnes (Mt) according to the Ports own Annual Report (published on its website)

<sup>2</sup> Townsville Bulletin, 8 November 2017

<sup>3</sup> Enough to build a wall one metre wide and four metres tall from Townsville to Port Douglas, every year.