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**Re: Sustainable Port Development Bill 2015 – Supplementary submission**

North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) provided a submission to the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry in relation to the Sustainable Ports Development Bill earlier this year (Submission number 015, dated 29 June 2015).

Having had the opportunity to now read submissions from other agencies to the inquiry, especially in relation to the suggestion that Cairns and Mourilyan ports be included in the Bill as Priority Development Ports, we wish to make this supplementary submission.

NQCC would be opposed to Cairns and Mourilyan ports being designated Priority Development Ports for the following reasons.

First, it would contradict the assurances made by the Commonwealth and State governments to UNESCO in relation to the protection of the World Heritage site. It was unequivocal in the report to UNESCO and in the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan that the development of priority ports along the GBR coast would be limited to four (Gladstone, Abbot Point, Townsville and Hay Point). To renege on that commitment so soon after the UNESCO decision would inevitably cast doubt on the seriousness of the governments in protecting the Reef, both in the minds of UNESCO officials and in the minds of the Australian people.

The recent oil spill in GBR waters, which remains un-identified, must surely have already raised concerns within UNESCO, as it has for the Australian public, as to the effectiveness of Australian Reef protection arrangements. To add to UNESCO concern by changing the commitments made to it in terms of port development would be irresponsible in the extreme.

Secondly, there is no apparent demand for either Cairns or Mourilyan to become priority ports for development. In the case of Cairns, the emergence of its port as a major industrial port would inevitably detract from Cairns' reputation as a tourism destination, with easy access to both the World Heritage GBR and the World Heritage Wet Tropics.

CEO and Chair of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is on record in Hansard as acknowledging that dredging in Cairns is instrumental in the development of the mud flats that represent Cairns' 'beaches'. To worsen this situation would be catastrophic for the tourism industry of the region.

Thirdly, as noted in the Strategic Assessment of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage region, the two ports are well north along the GBR and, as such, are in much better condition than areas further south. Further development would, according to the Strategic Assessment, jeopardise their relatively healthy condition. It is essential that they be protected from industrial development if the health of the already struggling Reef is not to deteriorate even further.

The current arrangements do not impose significant constraints on the workings of either Cairns or Mourilyan port, both of which have the capacity to expand within limits. As a result, there is no justification for them to be designated priority ports.

On the basis of the above arguments, we urge the Committee against recommending the inclusion of Cairns and Mourilyan ports as 'Priority Ports'.



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Coordinator