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MEDIA RELEASE

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Worst coral bleaching ever but the Port looks to increase the stress on the Reef

1000 kms of our Great Barrier Reef has just been devastated by the worst coral bleaching on record and Townsville Port has announced it wants to expand its size and dredge massive amounts of seafloor within 1500 metres of some of our finest beaches and fringing reefs.

‘Expansion of the Port make no sense’ said North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) Coordinator Wendy Tubman, ‘and the timing of this announcement only emphasises this.

‘Back in 2009, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) told us that the greatest threat to the Reef was climate change, and that, to give the Reef the best chance of survival, additional stresses on it must be limited. GBRMPA identified one of the major stresses for the Reef as coastal development.

‘This was confirmed in the 2014 Strategic Assessment of the GBR World Heritage Area, undertaken at the request of UNESCO.

‘Now, climate-change related coral bleaching is devastating the Reef. Professor Terry Hughes from JCU this week found that, of the 520 reefs he surveyed in the most pristine area of the Reef, between Cairns and the Torres Strait, only four have escaped bleaching.

‘Meanwhile, National Coral Bleaching Taskforce project manager James Kerry told the *Townsville Bulletin* that corals off Townsville could be in an even worse position than the northern reefs if there were to be another bleaching event.

‘Yet, despite the dire situation and the warnings from experts, the Port plans to increase the stress on the Reef, and jeopardise its 69,000 tourism jobs, by increasing dredging and shipping in Townsville.

'The reasons for the expansion given in the 2013 environmental impact statement were anticipated increases in the trade of coal, magnetite and nickel.

'With none of those commodities likely to be using the already under-utilised port, the reason for expanding the port has disappeared.

'It is imperative that the government does not give an open-ended approval for any expansion, enabling the Port to use it in 10 or 20 years time. By then the situation on which the approval was given may be very different.

'NQCC and associated experts will examine the report in detail, and will challenge any aspects that are detrimental to the Reef, in particular Cleveland Bay, a known biodiversity hot spot.

'NQCC will also continue and strengthen its campaign for more money for Reef rescue and stronger action on climate change, including an end to all new coal mines, major contributors to climate change.'

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