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MEDIA RELEASE

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Abbot Point – timing of legal action not the issue

Federal Minister for the Environment Hunt claims that legal action against proposals to dump dredge spoil in the Caley Valley Wetlands is 'a political stunt' and 'timed to coincide with the State election'. The claims are ill-founded and draw attention away from the totally unacceptable approval process, rife with conflict of interest, that is being followed, according to North Queensland Conservation Council.

'The timing of this action has been dictated entirely by Federal and State governments actions and decisions and the statutory time periods that require legal actions to occur within set time periods' said NQCC Coordinator Wendy Tubman.

'But the timing is of small concern when compared with the process, which sees everything from the commissioning of consultants on impacts, to the preparation of the project proposal, to the assessment of applications all under the umbrella of the same State department.

'Toward the end of last year, the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning in Newman's 'we're in the coal business' government, Jeff Seeney, dismissed the State-owned North Queensland Bulk Ports as proponents for the Abbot Point port coal terminal expansion. He replaced them with 'Economic Development Queensland' (EDQ). In addition to his other roles, Mr Seeney is also Minister for Economic Development and EDQ falls within his portfolio.

EDQ is, according to the Department of State Development's website, 'a self-funded commercialised business unit', to which Mr Seeney can delegate powers. The website states the EDQ is about 'Fast-tracking residential, urban and industrial development'.

'Mr Seeney then appointed Michael Schaumburg to his Department to direct the Abbot Point proposal, to 'make it happen'. Schaumburg is responsible for lodging applications for approvals for work to be done in relation to the project under various state government Acts.

'These applications are assessed by the Coordinator General. The Office of Coordinator General is also part of Mr Seeney's Department of State Development. The Coordinator General's role is, according to the Department's website, 'principally focused on facilitating and regulating private-sector infrastructure projects'. His office is located next to that of the powerful Mr Seeney.

'When railing against the legal action, Mr Hunt needs to understand that the vast majority of Queenslanders are concerned about what is proposed for Abbot Point.

'He might also look more closely at the objectivity of the process that is being followed outside the legal process, because that reeks of conflict of interest and is totally unacceptable' Ms Tubman concluded.

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