



114 Boundary Street
Railway Estate, Townsville
Qld, 4810
PO Box 364, Townsville
Ph: 61 07 47716226
office@nqcc.org.au
www.nqcc.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Ewen Jones against port expansion

In a surprise to all attending the North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) 'Election and the Environment' forum last night, LNP candidate for the seat of Herbert in the up-coming election Ewen Jones came out strongly against the proposed expansion of the Townsville port, saying that there is no economic rationale for it in the short to medium term. ALP candidate Cathy O'Toole also opposed the proposal.

Earlier in the year, North Queensland Conservation Council made the same point in submissions to the State and Federal governments.

In its Environmental Impact Statement, the Port based its rationale for expansion largely on the anticipated introduction of coal exports and expansion of magnetite exports and of nickel imports (the latter two associated with QNI's Yabulu 'doubling in size and diversifying into magnetite'). Since then, the structural decline of the coal industry has become clear to all, doubt has been cast on the expansion of QNI's nickel refinery at Yabulu, and there has been little or no mention of its plans to diversify into magnetite.

Undaunted, the Port is now arguing that it is used to commodity cycles and that the expansion is still necessary, although it no longer makes any suggestions as to what it expects to export through a massively increased port.

NQCC Coordinator Wendy Tubman said that the revelation by the LNP's Mr Jones was probably the greatest surprise to come out of the forum, which drew a good crowd and many questions about the port development and the impact of dredging and spoil disposal on the marine environment, the World Heritage Area and the tourism industry, as well as questions about the management of National Parks, renewable energy, uranium, government subsidies to the coal industry and climate change.

Ms Tubman did, however, express concern about the extensive use by candidates of the term 'balanced' when it came to development in the environment, pointing out that "if jobs are valued (weighted) more highly than the environment, balance can only be achieved if more environmental damage is permitted".

Contact: Wendy Tubman 0428 987 535