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MEDIA RELEASE

9 August 2013

NQCC supports delay in Abbot Point decision

North Queensland Conservation Council today commended the Federal Minister for the Environment for postponing the decision on whether or not to allow proposed dredging to go ahead at Abbot Point, south of Townsville.

The proposal would involve the dumping of 3 million cubic metres of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. However, after environmentalists pointed out that the original site for dumping was very close to a WWII crash site and to important fishing grounds, no specific site was identified by the proponent, North Queensland Bulk Ports.

The proponent was looking for approval for dumping in an unspecified area.

Just hours before the Minister's statement outlining the postponement, the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities released a report based on research it had commissioned. It showed that dredge material placed at sea has the potential to migrate on a much greater scale than previously thought.

The report also reveals that:

- All Environment Impact Statements done on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park port projects have been extremely conservative in estimating the impact of dredging.
- The coastal geomorphology of a number of existing ports (Cairns, Townsville and Gladstone) means that the amount of maintenance dredging required is likely to double. This would result in an additional 460,000 tonnes of dredge material dumped in the Reef World Heritage Area.
- The projected volume for dredge spoil disposal into the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (based on current proposals) totals 43.8 million tonnes (42.4 million tonnes capital and 1.4 million tonnes maintenance), assuming that all proposals are constructed. This could potentially represent a 3,000% increase in volume for disposal over the next 3 years.
- The amount of "fines" (silt and clay particles <35 micrometres in size) in capital dredge material is 30%. If all the proposed projects are approved they could contribute up to 13 million tonnes of additional resuspended sediment to the waters of the Reef over the next 3-5 years.

"In the circumstances, and given that UNESCO as well as multitudes of senior marine scientists have expressed alarm about the impact of port development on the Great Barrier Reef, it is only sensible that the Minister consider further information before making a decision" said Wendy Tubman, Coordinator of North Queensland Conservation Council.

Tourism operators and fishers have also spoken out against the dredging because of the impact that it would be likely to have on their industries.

"We appreciate that the new Minister is not rushing into a major decision that could have catastrophic environment, social and economic impacts without all the necessary information."

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