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MEDIA RELEASE

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NQCC SAYS: “NO SEA-DUMPING”

The idea of dumping 5.6 million cubic metres of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area halfway between Cape Cleveland and Magnetic Island is outrageous says North Queensland Conservation Council Coordinator Wendy Tubman.

“This massive sea-dumping exercise is part of the plan for the expansion of the port. And the initial dumping would be followed up by regular dumps associated with maintenance dredging.

“The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) commissioned by the Port, notes that ‘*much of the spoil is soft and compressible silt*’, *material that tends to be highly re-suspendible*, and that ‘*material [from the Dredge Material Placement Area] is transported from the spoil ground to the NE coastline of Magnetic Island*’.

“Again according to the EIS, the material to be dredged is likely to contain potential acid sulphate soil and contaminants such as nickel, copper and arsenic.

“While the EIS proposes a dredge management plan, its assurances offer little comfort. For example, the EIS notes that ‘*Silt curtains will be used to prevent migration of turbid plumes when practicable*’ and ‘*If contaminated sediments are detected, use a mechanical grab dredge (with silt curtains)...*’ but goes on to state ‘*...silt curtains could only [be] used when favourable conditions permit as they would be ineffective when high waves, currents or considerable tidal variation occurs, as is commonly the case in dredge footprint areas in Townsville*’.

“Cleveland Bay is recognised as a biodiversity hotspot. It is a Dugong Protection Area, nesting ground for turtles, and important habitat for dolphins and whales. Furthermore, the seagrass meadows of Townsville have been identified as one of four regions in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) facing the highest level of risk from anthropogenic impacts.

“Given the threats to the GBRWHA highlighted by the GBRMPA 2009 Outlook Report, by the work of the Australian Institute of Marine Science and by scientists at James Cook University, and the concern of UNESCO, the sea-dumping of this material cannot be condoned under any circumstances.

“Quite apart from the environmental desecration, what would happen to the fringing reefs of Magnetic Island and its tourism industry that is so important to Townsville and the region?”

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