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Research Director
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane QLD 4000
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SUSTAINABLE PORTS DEVELOPMENT BILL 2015 – SUBMISSION TO THE INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Advance Cairns and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce welcome the opportunity to comment on the Sustainable Ports Development Bill 2015.

Advance Cairns is the peak regional economic development and investment promotion organisation for Tropical North Queensland (TNQ). It plays a key role in advocacy for growth creating projects, investment and development for the region. Advance Cairns facilitates connections between private enterprise, industry, community, government agencies and political representatives to maximise the opportunities for economic and social development for TNQ, focusing on diversification for economic growth and prosperity.

The Cairns Chamber of Commerce is the peak body for business representation in the Cairns region, constructively and collaboratively driving business growth outcomes for members and in the best interests of the Cairns regional business community. As the voice of business, the Cairns Chamber strategically facilitates the growth of industry, supports infrastructure development, and lead changes that drive increased business productivity, employment, trade and investment.

The Ports of Cairns and Mourilyan

The Ports of Cairns and Mourilyan are strategic ports and are critical for enabling economic growth and supporting the regional, state and national economy. These ports have been long established and support a diverse range of port industries.

Cairns is a strategic regional hub in Northern Australia for maritime asset bases and maintenance support. The Cairns Port provides flexibility and capacity for growth in

positioning Naval and Customs maritime assets close to their areas of operations, without the constraints of major cargo shipping operations.

The Cairns port is a supply hub for Northern Australia and a key component of logistic support to the Cape and Torres Strait communities.

HMAS Cairns is the second largest naval facility on the east Australian coast, and facilitates significant naval support capability for Australia's Defence.

Maintenance facilities in the Cairns port provide significant MRO and build capability for a range of vessels to 3000mt and 90m. A variety of complementary facilities exist to provide significant capacity for fleet base expansion and support. World class maritime training further complements the Cairns port as a complete facility for vessel support.

The Cairns Port is recognised as one of Australia's busiest cruise vessel ports. Our growth capacity is limited however, as cruise vessels increase in size as the market expands. Expansion of the port facilities over time will provide for sustainable development to growth and prosperity of the region, in pace with the market's growth.

The Queensland Ports Strategy 2014 identified Cairns as a multi-purpose regional port that caters for a diverse range of uses including bulk and general cargo, Defence, cruise shipping, fishing fleet and reef passenger ferries. The total trade in 2012–13 was 1.06 million tonnes.

The Port of Mourilyan supports exports of raw sugar, molasses, timber products, and livestock; and has the capacity to expand into new bulk cargo. Onshore sugar and molasses handling and storage facilities as well as a single sugar loader and associated wharf are located within a sheltered natural harbour.

Cairns and Mourilyan as Priority Ports

Both Cairns and Mourilyan, as a 'two port solution', should be designated as priority ports within the Bill. Critical to the regional economy, the importance of these ports can be measured by the diversity of activity, spanning passenger, cargo, Defence, and marine precinct activities. Expansion of the listed priority ports areas to include Cairns and Mourilyan is seen as critical to sustainable port development in the region.

The bill restricts development to priority ports, limiting the opportunity for small scale incremental development; such as slipways, expansion of Defence assets, barge ramps and wharves. Such developments should be able to be progressed in a sustainable and environmentally sound manner, which is held up to the highest level of EIS scrutiny.

The Reef 2050 plan released in March 2015, restricts capital dredging for the development of new or expansion of existing port facilities to within the regulated port limits of the Priority Port Development Areas (PPDA) of Gladstone, Hay Point– Mackay, Abbot Point and Townsville.

As outlined in the Advance Cairns submission to the Queensland Ports Strategy, a mechanism could be considered to allow the Cairns/Mourilyan port combination to become a priority port in the future, if there is a compelling economic and port development argument supported by appropriate environmental assessment. The proposed Bill limits consideration of the development of economic activity in regions outside priority ports. The Cairns Chamber of Commerce also supports this position.

The current Bill does not provide for a mechanism for review of priority ports. Should circumstances change, such as changes to vessel size, or other operational aspects, provision should be made within the Bill for review of designated priority ports. This strengthens the case for designation of Cairns and Mourilyan as priority ports.

Furthermore, the proposed Bill constrains the future economic development highlighted by the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia. We request mechanisms be integrated into the Bill that allow for appropriate responses that support existing port masterplans; and for future economic / business / industry growth needs for Cairns and Mourilyan ports.

Dredge Material Use

The beneficial use of dredge spoil, as outlined in the Bill, is supported. Continued research into the beneficial use of dredge material should be considered to fully utilise dredge material and provide for efficiencies in port management.

We support the current arrangements in regards to maintenance dredging and welcome the Bill's exclusion of maintenance dredging and current sea disposal options in its application.

Additional costs from restrictions in the placement or use of any dredge material adds costs to port management and sustainability, and impacts the viability of current and future projects.

Transitional Provisions

The Bill's transitional provisions provide for consideration of the current Cairns Shipping Development Environmental Impact Statement. This work should be retained and continued to support the work of Ports North on the project, and should consider and exhaust all options for development.

Consultation

The consultation that has been conducted to date for this Bill is considered deficient. Far more engagement and consultation needs to be conducted with impacted or potentially impacted businesses, industries and groups that represent these constituents. We seek advice regarding whether a Regulatory Impact Statement will be conducted.

Conclusion

Critical to the development of our region is the development of port facilities in existing areas, supported by economic, community and social infrastructure. This ensures that maximum efficiencies are achieved from current port developments in the most efficient manner.

Critical also is the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and our reputation in its management and continuous improvement.

We believe that both the Cairns and Mourilyan ports will need to continue to develop to support the growth of the regional economy, consistent with Master Plans and where demand exists. Both ports, as a 'two port solution', should be designated as priority ports to allow such future development.

Ports North will need to be able to continue to undertake incremental development projects at existing, new berths or channels to maintain operational efficiencies and/or cater for our region's growth and prosperity.

Advance Cairns and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce are thankful for the opportunity for consideration of our joint submission to the Committee.



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