

Media Release

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Port report a welcome contribution

A report released on 24 April 2014 on port channel maintenance and environmental management in tropical and sub-tropical Australia will make a valuable contribution to community discussion about the importance of Australian Ports and port related dredging, Ports North Chairman Brett Moller said.

The independent report, commissioned by Ports Australia, provides an overview of the approval processes associated with dredging and at-sea placement of dredged material, as well as the extent of environmental monitoring programs for Australia's northern ports.

It compared the monitored environmental impacts of recent port related dredging projects against the environmental performance criteria approved by government and found that projects in northern Australia "have performed well".

Monitoring has also shown that natural events such as cyclones or floods may result in much greater and more prolonged environmental changes to coral and seagrass communities than those related to dredging.

Mr Moller said Ports North had contributed data to the environmental consultants who prepared the report. It was prepared by environmental assessor Dr Rick Morton, of RMC Pty Ltd, and peer reviewed by Dr Ian Irvine of Pollution Research Pty Ltd (who is routinely engaged by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as an independent expert on dredging and ocean disposal issues) to ensure its scientific rigour.

Mr Moller said "the report confirmed the extensive nature of assessments and approvals Ports require under international, commonwealth and state legislation before undertaking dredging.

Australia's National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging (NAGD) which form the basis of impact assessment for all dredging projects, are recognised internationally as industry-leading guidelines."

"Environmental performance is critical to our business," Mr Moller said. "The Port of Cairns has been dredging for 100 years with the most recent channel widening occurring in 1990.

"In 2010, we were the first port in Australia to attain a 10-year at-sea dredge placement permit from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for channel maintenance dredging. This is an indication of confidence in our demonstrated track record of scientific research and effective environmental monitoring of dredging and disposal."

Mr Moller said: "We take very seriously the World Heritage Values of the Great Barrier Reef and the responsibility we have to assist in its protection for future generations. That is why we are delivering an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) into the Cairns Shipping Development Project that will be one of the most rigorous of its type undertaken in Australia."

Mr Moller said that supporting Cairns as the cruise ship capital of northern Australia and ensuring the future for the Great Barrier Reef were not mutually exclusive aims.

“Ports North is a strong supporter of the community, regional development and the environment in which we operate,” Mr Moller said.

“The contribution of this latest report to a balanced and reasonable public discussion about the need for port dredging is most welcomed.”

The report, *“Dredging and Australian Ports: Subtropical and Tropical Ports”* is available on the Ports Australia website www.portsaustralia.com.au