

# Media Release

Wednesday, 29 January 2014

## Concerned scientists demand rejection of permit for dumping dredge spoil in Great Barrier Reef's waters

About 240 Australian scientists have today called upon the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GRMPA) to reject a permit for dumping dredge spoil from the Abbot Point port development in the Great Barrier Reef's waters.

In a signed joint letter, the scientists urge GBRMPA to heed the best available science, including the recent report commissioned by GBRMPA on transport of disposed dredge sediment, that shows expansion of Abbot Point port will have detrimental impacts on the Reef.

Co-author of the statement Dr Selina Ward from The University of Queensland said if GBRMPA held true to its charter of protecting the values of the Reef and using the best knowledge for sustainable management then it would have no choice but to reject the dumping permit.

"GBRMPA's decision on the dumping permit comes at a critical time for the Great Barrier Reef," Dr Ward said today.

"The scientific consensus is that key Great Barrier Reef ecosystems are in decline and face continued pressure from human impacts and the cumulative impacts of climate change.

"Permission for dumping 5 million tonnes of dredged sediment in the Reef's marine park would have a detrimental impact on the Reef and make the situation worse.

"The dumping of dredge spoils in the Reef's waters off Abbot Point is in opposition to the Authority's charter to protect the marine park and against the recommendations of UNESCO.

"As scientists, we're concerned the impacts of dredging will exacerbate the existing stresses for the Great Barrier Reef and should not go ahead," she said.

**Media Contact: Jane Garcia 0434 489 533**

**NOTE: See next page for full text of letter**

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## **Letter from concerned scientists to Prof Russell Reichelt, chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**

Dear Prof Reichelt,

Re: North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation Limited/Transport - water/Approx 3km offshore Abbot Point/QLD/Abbot Point Terminal 0, 2 & 3 Capital Dredging  
Date Received: 05 Dec 2011 Reference Number: 2011/6213

The undersigned concerned scientists call upon the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to deny approval of the permit for dumping dredge material in the sea from the Abbot Point Port Development. This would be in opposition to the Charter of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. In the words of the GBRMPA:

The agency's primary role is best conceptualised through the outcome we aim to achieve: The long-term protection, ecologically sustainable use, understanding and enjoyment of the Great Barrier Reef for all Australians and the international community, through the care and development of the Marine Park.

The first three points of GBRMPA's approach are the following:

- Protect the values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area using an ecosystem-based management approach and manage activities so that they are ecologically sustainable.
- Promote ecologically sustainable use of the Marine Park and the coast and catchments adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef.
- Use the best available science, knowledge and information to support environmental policy, regulation and conservation outcomes.

The best available science, including the recent report commissioned by GBRMPA on transport of disposed dredge sediment, makes it very clear that expansion of the port at Abbot Point will have detrimental effects on the Great Barrier Reef. Sediment from dredging can smother corals and seagrasses and expose them to poisons and elevated nutrients. Claiming to 'offset' the 5 million

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tonnes of dredged sediment by catchment work is the wrong approach and very unlikely to be possible with the limitations of budget and workforce. We need to avoid creating this dredged sediment in the first place, whilst also working within the catchments to reduce run off.

The Great Barrier Reef is already under stress from climate change and land use practices. In order to increase the resilience of the reef, we need to improve water quality as much as possible, rather than pollute the reef with further industrialisation. Exporting the vast quantities of coal from the Galilee Basin through Abbot Point and other port developments will result in a rapid rise in future greenhouse emissions, which will further exacerbate the effects of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef.

Increasing ship movements through the GBR will increase the probability of ship groundings, oil spills, animal strikes and the introduction of marine pests.

Please Prof Reichelt, consider the health of the Great Barrier Reef, follow the recommendations of UNESCO and do not approve this permit.

Regards,

Endorsed by The Australian Coral Reef Society, professional society of coral reef researchers and managers with about 320 members.

Signed:

Prof Bernard Degnan, UQ

Prof Bette Willis, JCU

Prof Bill Laurance, JCU

Prof Bob Steneck, University of Maine

Prof Chris Battershill, University of Waikato

Prof Craig Franklin, UQ

Prof David Booth, UQ

Prof David Booth, UTS

Prof David Ritz, UTas

Prof Jeffrey Leis, Australian Museum

Prof John Pandolfi, UQ

Prof Justin Marshall, UQ

Prof Maria Byrne, USyd

Prof Mark McCormick, JCU

Prof Mary Garson, UQ

Prof Michel Pichon, Museum of Tropical Queensland

Prof Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, UQ

Prof Paul Southgate, JCU

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Prof Pierre Horwitz, Edith Cowan University  
Prof Richard Pearson, JCU  
Prof Rob Harcourt, Macquarie University  
Prof Stuart Phinn, UQ  
Prof Terry Hughes, JCU and COE Coral Reefs  
Assoc Prof Andrew Barnes, UQ  
Assoc Prof Anne Goldizen, UQ  
Assoc Prof Elizabeth Sinclair, UWA  
Assoc Prof Ian Tibbetts, UQ  
Assoc Prof Robert Day, University of Melbourne  
Assoc Prof Ross Coleman, USyd  
Assoc Prof Sandie Degnan, UQ  
Assoc Prof Sassan Asgari, UQ  
Assoc Prof Stephen Smith, SCU  
Assoc Prof Thomas Cribb, UQ  
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Dr Adriana Verges, UNSW  
Dr Alastair Harborne, UQ  
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Dr Alexandra Grutter, UQ  
Dr Amanda Reid, Australian Museum  
Dr Amelia Wegner, JCU  
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Dr Anne Stanley, JCU  
Dr Ashley Field, Australian Tropical Herbarium  
Dr Barbara Weuringer, JCU  
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Dr Jane Williamson, Macquarie University  
Dr Janine Baker, Marine Educators Society Australasia  
Dr Jasmine Roberts, JCU  
Dr Javier Leon Patino, UQ  
Dr Jennifer Donelson, JCU  
Dr Jens Zinke, UWA  
Dr Joanne Davy  
Dr Joanne Wilson, Sea Solutions  
Dr Jodi Rowley, Australian Museum Research Institute  
Dr John Richmond Ford, University of Melbourne  
Dr John Turnbull, Macquarie University  
Dr Jonathan Neville, OnlyOnePlanet  
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Dr Karen Burke da Silva, Flinders University  
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Dr Nicole Patten, UWA  
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Dr Patrick Ward, UQ  
Dr Peter Rothlisberg, CSIRO  
Dr Peter Wood, JCU  
Dr Ross Hill, UNSW  
Dr Sabah Abdullah, UQ  
Dr Scarla Weeks, UQ  
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