

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 30th April 2009

Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook Inc.

'PORT HINCHINBROOK' - SEADUMPING REFUSED !

This week the newly combined Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management has refused an Application by Port Hinchinbrook Services Pty Ltd for Resource Entitlement for the Sea Dumping of dredge spoil into the world heritage listed Hinchinbrook Passage.

As well as being part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, the Passage is part of the Hinchinbrook Dugong Protection Area; and is listed as an "area of state significance" under the Cardwell Hinchinbrook Regional Coastal Management Plan.

Seadumping, a dirty activity, was judged unable to meet the Plan's test of "no adverse impact".

Interdepartmental correspondence from the (former) Environment Protection Agency (EPA) to the (former) Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNRW) stated EPA's "objection to the proposal [for seadumping of dredge spoil] and to the granting of resource entitlement for this purpose".

According to the Application documents, the plan was to dredge the sediments that rapidly silt up the waterways of the 'Port Hinchinbrook' marina and canal estate and dump them into the Hinchinbrook Passage, just past the shallows at about the ten metre contour line. Because of the extreme rate of silting up, the dredging and dumping was expected to go on for as long as six months at a time, every year.

The Applicant, Port Hinchinbrook Services Pty Ltd (a company controlled by Keith Williams), has been refused permits to dump any more dredge spoil on nearby agricultural land. Already 30 hectares have been covered with acid soils and saline dredge spoil right alongside Girramay National Park. As a result, much of the national park has died.

Spokesperson for ASH, Ms Moorhouse said, "This rejected Application was open-ended, in that Keith Williams Corporation had made a new Development Application for yet another large marina, and this fact was not disclosed in the Seadumping Application by Port Hinchinbrook Services. There was therefore no end in sight to the amount of seadumping that was envisaged, with untold damaging impacts had it once been allowed to begin".

Ms Moorhouse said "The rapid infilling after dredging in the Hinchinbrook Passage should be no surprise to anyone: it has long been documented by government agencies, including in 1977 by the Queensland Harbours and Marine Department."

Ms Moorhouse continued: "It is very welcome news that the state government's Coastal Plan has been effective in preventing activities in the Hinchinbrook Passage that would otherwise have seriously harmed the area's world heritage values and integrity."

The many direct threatened impacts of dredge spoil dumping in the Hinchinbrook Passage included smothering and contamination of the seagrass meadows on which the endangered dugongs and other marine creatures depend; smothering of the benthic (seabottom) communities; boating contaminants in the sediments (such as toxic antifouling paints) which then enter the food chain via ingestion by benthic organisms; and displacement of dugongs from areas vital to their survival by underwater vibration and noise from the dredge pipes and motors.

Indirect threats included higher risks of boat strike and the permanent displacement of dugongs, due to the expected increase in boating traffic if the 'Port Hinchinbrook' waterways could be kept open.

Ms Moorhouse, who has long yachting experience, concluded: "Users of 'Port Hinchinbrook' will learn to work the tides as boaties have always done along this shallow coast. We can only hope that they will also learn to respect the world heritage values of the local area, its dugongs, snubfin dolphins, and turtles."

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