



Environmental Assessment Branch

EPBC Referrals

Emailed to: epbc.referrals@environment.gov.au

11 February 2013

Re: Proposed Cairns Shipping Development (Trinity Inlet) Project (EPBC 2012/6538)

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) is the peak environment organisation for the region from Cardwell north to Torres Strait and from the coast west to the Gulf of Carpentaria. CAFNEC is a non-profit, community organisation that has been operating for over 30 years with the aim of encouraging the community to value, protect and restore the natural environment. We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft EIS Guidelines, and offer the following comments for consideration.

The Proposed Cairns Shipping Development Project (the project) has the potential to cause serious, long-term damage to the marine ecosystems of the surrounding Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Dredge spoil disposal is already an issue for Trinity Inlet, and the project would see an increase of around 260,000 m³/year of dredge spoil disposed of in the Great Barrier Reef.

There are already many pressures on the marine environment, such as increasing sediment and nutrient loads due to coastal development and agriculture and removal of mangrove and riparian vegetation; increasing ocean temperature and acidity; and injuries and death to marine life as a result of marine pollution. The project would add to these pressures, heightening the risks associated with this project. We are pleased to see the requirement for the proponent to provide an assessment of cumulative impacts of the project, and would like to request that this cumulative impacts study is rigorous and reflects the realistic probability of compounding effects from multiple factors.

The guidelines state that: *The EIS must identify and address cumulative impacts, where potential impacts are in addition to existing impacts of other activities (including known current and future expansions or development by the proponent and other proponents in the region and vicinity).*

We suggest that the cumulative impacts study should therefore be required to factor in the proposed Cairns Airport expansion project which would involve extensive clearing of mangrove vegetation at the mouth of the nearby Barron River. It should also factor in rising water temperatures, ocean acidification, Crown of Thorns infestations, the impacts of continued coastal development (leading to decreased water quality) and the impacts of likely future flood events such as 2011 following cyclone Yasi when high numbers of turtle and dugong fatalities were recorded.

Marine ecosystems are complex and diverse. Our region depends on a healthy marine environment to support the economy, and such risks as those posed by this project should not be taken lightly. The project should not go ahead unless it can be proven that it can proceed without causing adverse impacts on the environment.

Anna McGuire

Coordinator