

25 March 2013

Ms Anthea Tinney  
Chairman  
Independent Review of the Port of Gladstone  
GPO Box 787  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Tinney,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Independent Review of the Port of Gladstone.

Ports Australia is the peak industry body representing all port authorities and corporations, both publicly and privately owned, at the national level. Ports Australia is a constituted company limited by guarantee with a Board of Directors, comprising the CEOs of eleven member ports. Our website is at [www.portsaustralia.com.au](http://www.portsaustralia.com.au)

The Issues Paper rightly notes that the Port of Gladstone has been in operation for many years. The Port of Gladstone Corporation is a complex and highly integrated port operation with export and import supply chains of national economic significance. The port has invested substantially in infrastructure, providing jobs for the regional community with whom it has a close and enduring relationship. The port enjoys an enviable record of liaison with exporters in the region and has undertaken the necessary forward planning over many years, growing to be the largest port in the region.

We note the concerns expressed in the UNESCO State of Conservation Report which recommended that the World Heritage Committee maintain a watching brief on the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. However, we believe that the UNESCO report findings should be treated with considerable caution. The report provides an insufficient basis to compromise the striking of a balance that effectively facilitates the development of the Queensland economy through appropriately managed growth in port capacity. Already this outcome is at risk by uninformed rhetoric about the impact of port development in Gladstone and in the broader Great Barrier Reef (GBR) which, among other things, is not informed by good scientific evidence or objective analysis. Discussions around the environmental impacts of dredging and shipping in Gladstone have been exaggerated and scientific research has indicated that the impacts are at a low or minimal level. It is also important to note that shipping activities and port developments are not the primary impacts upon the reef.

The Queensland Government has signed up to the Australian Government's National Ports Strategy (NPS). We also note that the Great Barrier Reef Port Strategy (GBRPS) will feed into an overall Queensland Ports Strategy (QPS). Policy alignment between the GBRPS, the QPS, the NPS and the National Land Freight Strategy and with local government planning schemes is essential. All of the planning programs need to address long-term coordinated planning around future port capacity, supply chain and transport corridors, including shipping channels. It is arguable that the Great Barrier Reef is already one of the most highly regulated marine environments in the world. Additional regulation may risk impacting the economic development of the Queensland and Australian economies and provide little in the way of additional environmental benefit.

Ongoing sustainable development of all ports in the World Heritage Area and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is essential.

Port of Gladstone Corporation, together with all of the Queensland ports, is an active participant in the current Strategic Environmental Assessment which is being undertaken at the behest of the World Heritage Committee. Indeed, there are a significant number of environmentally-based inquiries presently underway in which all of the Queensland ports are actively involved.

Notwithstanding these observations, and pending the results of this review and the Strategic Assessment, all of the ports located in the GBR continue to apply a highly precautionary approach with all developments that might impact on the World Heritage Area including on the basis that they have a long association with the reef and a profound stake in its health and well-being.

Ports are continually striving to be good environmental citizens. We have not jumped onto the bandwagon calling for less environmental regulation or "green tape". Our ports recognise that they are central to some of the biggest infrastructure developments along the Queensland coast, most of which are within the World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. We recognise that major projects can cause community concern and one of the best ways of addressing those concerns is by fulfilling obligations with environmental assessments and by ports showing that they are willing participants in a clear and transparent assessment process. Central to their strategic objectives, our Queensland members have a successful and sustainable co-existence with the Great Barrier Reef and have indicated, to the extent that they exist, a preparedness to engage on impacts, mitigation and remedial strategies that are anchored by objective, evidence-based scientific assessment. These processes allow the community and industry proponents alike to come together in the consultation process so that real community concerns can be addressed. Clarity and certainty with legislative and regulatory settings are critical to proponents and the community alike.

The Gladstone industrial region has expanded rapidly in recent years. Because of its positioning, its natural advantages as a deep water port, it is likely that the economy of the Gladstone regional will further diversify and grow. For this reason, it is a good case study for developing sound public policies applying to port/industry complexes that strike an appropriate balance between economic, environmental and social aspirations.

The Australian and Queensland Governments have put in place rigorous mechanisms which all proponents must obey. Gladstone and indeed all Queensland ports have shown themselves to be highly responsible environmental citizens. We support calls for a balanced approach for environmental assessments and note that the requirements for monitoring of potential impacts contained within planning approvals are met and often exceeded by our ports.

Ports Australia believes that port development can and must be permitted to continue in an environmentally responsible manner whilst ensuring that the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Area is protected together with the values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Ports Australia would be pleased to provide further information on request.

Yours sincerely,



David Anderson  
Chief Executive Officer