



## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC

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## SUBMISSION

to

### Department of Industry - Lands

[yourportcrownland.engagementhq.com](http://yourportcrownland.engagementhq.com)

### on the NSW Regional Ports Strategy

#### Introduction

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 28 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance.

The recent push to interest governments to support a massive “mega” port and rail development at the mouth of the Clarence River, was a serious wake-up call for the valley's residents, most of whom are fully aware of the value and beauty of the regions natural environment which would have been severely impacted by such a proposal.

In considering “*the NSW Regional Ports Strategy*” designed to “*guide the future of infrastructure and assets owned by the department in these ports*”, the CEC believes the above values should be recognised and their protection placed front and foremost when any planning decisions are made, particularly along the coastal strip.

Therefore, we believe the proposed planning our ports for the future should be a-political and take a long-term view. Frankly we are frustrated by the political games that see these plans reviewed and altered, sometimes completely overturned, with every change of government – i.e. at least once every decade.

This submission will focus on the Clarence Valley region.

#### **The NSW North Coast – a world renowned biodiversity hotspot.**

Thanks to a combination of climatic, geological and geographic factors, the NSW north coast supports an amazing assemblage of flora, which in turn supports an equally impressive range of unique fauna, a variety rarely equalled anywhere else in the world.

That diversity does not stop at the ocean's edge, but is also mirrored off-shore where a mixture of habitats for marine life includes corals and sea grasses, a blend of tropical and temperate species, the uniqueness of which has been recognised and protected in the Solitary Islands Marine Park and other sanctuaries in our region.

The decisions by previous governments to set aside these marine sanctuaries and rationalise commercial fishing, off shore and in our estuaries, has to be applauded. This has led to a significant increase in fish stocks, not only inside those sanctuaries, but elsewhere, a fact that has been welcomed by recreational fishers, locals, those from across the country, and from overseas.

### **Tourism driven economy**

With rugged mountain ranges, wild rivers, pristine mountain streams, some of the country's finest beaches, backed up by internationally renowned national parks, world heritage rainforests, and marine reserves, tourists flock to the area. That tourism is the backbone of our regional economy and has massive potential for growth.

Another growth area is the nation's aging population, and much has been said about the negative impact it will have on the economy. However, we see that aged demographic as adding an exciting dimension to the regions economic well-being, bringing a demand for a range of services from hospitality, recreation, health and beauty, to health care.

The relatively low cost of housing in the region should make it an attractive retirement destination, something local councils should capitalise on.

This leads to a single conclusion, any port development must be sympathetic to the needs of the tourism and leisure industries, and the natural assets that attract visitors to the area. No large-scale industrial complexes, container terminals or live cattle export facilities as recently proposed, no dredging of reefs and sea grasses, and no associated noise, air and water pollution that cannot be avoided by such developments.

### **Climate change**

Something else that should automatically preclude large scale port developments in the Clarence Valley is sea level rise associated with global warming, and the fact that much of the lower Clarence floodplain is a delta, less than 1 metre above the high tide level, and highly erodible. Deep dredge the river, and the banks collapse.

### **Conclusion**

All future port development should be sensitive to the region's natural environment, and aimed at supporting the tourist and leisure industry, Marinas, commercial fishing facilities, marine precincts that support recreational fishing and diving charters, whale watching and similar operations.

We thank the Minister for this opportunity to comment, and hope the above suggestions are helpful and deemed to have merit.

Yours sincerely



Honorary Secretary