



Gladstone Ports Corporation

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Media Release

GPC welcomes findings of the independent scientific panel report into diseased fish in the Gladstone region

9 January 2012

Gladstone Ports Corporation (GPC) has welcomed the release of the report from the Independent Scientific Panel, chaired by Dr Ian Poiner.

CEO Leo Zussino said he welcomed comments by the chair of the scientific panel Dr Ian Poiner that they could not find fault with the water quality monitoring programmes undertaken by GPC, DERM, and PCIMP and that the monitoring was of a world class standard.

“This should dispel the concern of those community members about the independence of the testing regimes,” Mr Zussino said.

“The report states conclusively that toxicology results from the samples of fish taken throughout the harbour prove there is no link from the fish disease to dredging, or the disturbance of material caused by dredging.

“The report states ‘there is no evidence from the histopathology reports of heavy metal impacts on fish tissues. Most of the common heavy metals have a documented tissue pathology, which the Queensland Government pathologists would have recognised.’ “

The report sets out the scientific research carried out by toxicology and pathology experts in marine environments and includes expert findings into the diseases, possible causes and prevalence of those diseases in Gladstone Harbour.

In the report the Panel state barramundi appear to be more strongly affected because of the additional population stress associated with the introduction of an estimated 30,000 barramundi into the Gladstone Harbour between 12 December 2010 and March 2011 following the overflow of the Awoonga Dam.

“The addition of an estimated 30,000 large barramundi into an already stressed environment (floods) is likely to have caused a general environmental impact affecting barramundi and possible other species as a result of increased competition for food and increased harassment by predators,” the report states.

The Panel also noted the reports of disease from mud crabs and prawns, and concluded the incidence of bacterial infections and parasites observed were not unusual compared to previous studies in Gladstone Harbour and elsewhere.

Work was also undertaken by the team of experts to determine any possible linkages to the dredging operations currently being undertaken in the Western Basin.

The Panel concluded that the water quality results received to date indicate observed values of the measured water quality parameters are not unusual (compared to historical values and trends), except for extremely low salinity during the 2010-2011 wet season. A number of areas of the Harbour, including the Boyne River had zero or close to zero salinity for extended periods of time.

The report notes that changes in osmolarity and particularly the changes in sodium and potassium caused by changes in salinity can be lethal to some marine species.

Mr Zussino said GPC welcomed and accepted all findings of the report, including the need for GPC to continue monitoring all aspects of the dredging project extremely closely.

“While we have a stringent and comprehensive water quality monitoring programme in place including the monitoring of metals, we accept more can and will be done to reassure the public,” Mr Zussino said.

“This report provides many of the answers Gladstone people and businesses, including GPC, have been asking about the fish diseases.

“It is now clear from this report dredging is not the cause of the diseased fish found in Gladstone over the last 9 months.

“GPC intend to keep our commitment to the local community to develop the port responsibly and sustainably, and this includes a healthy crabbing and prawning industry.

“We have already implemented one of the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Panel.

“In October last year, we expanded the current water quality monitoring programme to include monthly analysis for dissolved metals (that is the fraction of metals in the water column that pass through a 0.45 micron filter).

Mr Zussino concluded that GPC would work with the state government and the independent scientific panel to ensure increased factual data is presented to the Gladstone community.

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