



## Gladstone Ports Corporation

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Our Ref: #1471739v8

24 January 2019

James Barker  
Assistant Secretary  
Assessments and Governance Branch  
Department of the Environment and Energy  
GPO Box 787, Canberra, ACT 2601

Dear Mr Barker

### **Response to Submission Received During Public Comment Period and Submission of Finalised Preliminary Documentation for the Clinton Vessel Interaction Project (EPBC 2017/7976).**

The Clinton Vessel Interaction Project (CVIP) draft Preliminary Documentation was available to the public from 10 to 21 December 2018 inclusive. One (1) public submission was received. This letter provides a summary of Gladstone Ports Corporation's (GPC's) consideration of and response to the submission and also confirms the finalisation of CVIP's Preliminary Documentation.

The public submission was received in the form of a three (3) page letter and the submission will be provided to the Department of Environment and Energy (the Department) for your reference and record. The submission notes that the two (2) week statutory timeframe did not enable the respondent to be in a position to receive legal advice nor seek expert advice to aid their submission. The submission also comments that the draft Preliminary Documentation was not immediately available online.

The draft Preliminary Documentation was available within business hours from 10 December 2018 at the Gladstone City Library and State Library of Queensland. In addition, the documentation was uploaded on to GPC's website by mid-day on 10 December 2018. The respondent who made the submission contacted GPC regarding documentation availability and was directed to it via phone conversation on the morning of 11 December 2018.

A summary of the comments made in the submission on the fundamentals of the Project and our responses are provided in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Summary of submission comments on the fundamentals of the project and GPC responses relevant to CVIP.**

Item No.	Submission Summarised	GPC Response
1	Gladstone Port is within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) and in close proximity to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). It is imperative that	GPC is conscious of the significance of the environment in which we operate and we are proud custodians of the environmental, social, cultural and economic values of our port areas. We undertake and support careful consideration of capital dredging proposals and the potential impacts to the OUV of the GBRWHA.



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	<p>capital dredging in the harbour is carefully considered particularly impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the GBRWHA. It is important that any capital dredging be considered with the utmost care.</p>	<p>A diligent assessment of potential impacts has been undertaken for CVIP, including an assessment of potential impacts to the OUV of the GBRWHA. This assessment is presented in the draft Preliminary Documentation including the assessment of potential impacts technical report (BMT Eastern Australia Pty Ltd 2018). The assessment concludes that the CVIP is not expected to result in significant impacts to the key features that have a Significant or Moderate contribution to the OUV of the GBRWHA in the Port of Gladstone.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p>It is understood that one of the alternatives to the CVIP is to implement a speed limit on ships in the area. It is not understood why this low cost, low impact option is not the preferred alternative. Speed limits are applied effectively on roads.</p>	<p>As documented in both the draft Preliminary Documentation and the project referral, as an interim measure, the Regional Harbour Master has instigated an administrative or manual control system including limiting the passing vessel speed and deploying additional tug assistance to hold vessels at berth at the RG Tanna Coal Terminal (RGCT) as laden cape-sized vessels depart from the Wiggins Island Coal Terminal via the Clinton Channel. GPC have also instigated administrative controls such as ceasing ship loading activities to mitigate risks to RGCT infrastructure when required.</p> <p>While administrative controls can mitigate the risk they do not remove the hazard and therefore do not provide permanent solutions to the problem. The CVIP aims to provide a permanent solution to the interaction forces issue.</p> <p>GPC undertook an Options Analysis of dredging and non-dredging solutions and determined that widening the Clinton Channel was the recommended solution. One of the options analysed was the continuation of the current administrative controls however this was determined to be an unacceptable long term solution. Details of the Options Analysis is provided in the project referral (EPBC 2017/7976).</p> <p>The recommended solution provides a permanent solution to the interaction forces issue and also ensures that port operational efficiency is maximised which assists to mitigate requirements for port expansion projects.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p>It is understood that no ship has broken away from its moorings due to the forces imposed by a passing ship but the existence of a potential safety issue is acknowledged.</p>	<p>It is documented in both the draft Preliminary Documentation and project referral, that since the commencement of operation of the Wiggins Island Coal Terminal there have been a number of vessels pulled away from the berths at the RGCT as a consequence of the interaction forces. This has resulted in the Regional Harbour Master enacting the administrative control system detailed above as an interim measure to mitigate the risk of a vessel break away. A vessel break away could result in a collision or vessel grounding incident and has the potential to negatively impact persons and property, port operations and environmental values of the Port of Gladstone.</p>



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The submission also comments on the last major capital dredging project undertaken by GPC in the Port of Gladstone, the Western Basin Dredging and Disposal Project (WBDDP) (EPBC 2009/4904). The comments relate to impacts to GPC reputation, the Gladstone fishing industry and community confidence in Government agencies. The submission provides eight links to reference material including newspaper articles, news stories and videos relevant to the WBDDP. We interpret these references focus on the key themes summarised in Table 2 below. We have provided responses to these key themes in the context of the CVIP. The CVIP proposes approximately 800,000m<sup>3</sup> of dredging over a duration of approximately four (4) months. The WBDDP involved the completion of approximately 22.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of dredging over a 29 month duration.

**Table 2: Summary of key themes in submission reference material and GPC responses relevant to CVIP**

Item No.	Submission Reference Material Key Theme Summarised	GPC Response
1	Dredge sediments containing contaminants that could cause harm to the aquatic environment and marine life including flow on effects to the fishing industry and public health.	<p>The sediments to be dredged in the CVIP footprint have been tested in accordance with a Sediment Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) approved by the Queensland Government inclusive of the <i>National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999, Amendment 1, 2013</i> (NEPM 2013), National Assessment Guidelines for Dredging (NAGD 2009) and other relevant guideline criteria including those relevant to Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS). Both the SAP (BMT WBM Pty Ltd 2016) and the Implementation report (Aurecon Australasia Pty Ltd 2016), which present the results of the analysis, are included in the project referral and the draft Preliminary Documentation.</p> <p>The results indicate that sediments within the Project area are clean as per NEPM 2013 and are therefore chemically suitable for placement within the reclamation area. In addition, further testing of the bioavailability of contaminants of potential concern such as elutriate and bioavailability testing is not required. Based on the ASS results, it is considered that an ASS management plan is not required for placement within a reclamation area.</p> <p>Overall, it was concluded in the assessment of potential impacts for the Project, that contaminants do not represent a key management issue for the Project. A technical report (BMT Eastern Australia Pty Ltd 2018) providing an updated assessment of potential impacts for the project was attached in the draft Preliminary Documentation.</p>
2	Water quality impacts that could cause harm to the aquatic environment and marine life.	<p>A key component of the draft Preliminary Documentation was the assessment of potential water quality impacts associated with the Project. This included an assessment of reduction in water quality as a result of the dredging activity causing light attenuation and smothering of seagrass and coral habitats within the Port of Gladstone and flow-on effects to marine life. Technical reports (BMT Eastern Australia Pty Ltd 2018, Port and Coastal Solutions 2018) providing a detailed assessment of potential impacts for the project were attached in the draft Preliminary Documentation.</p> <p>The impact assessment presented in the draft Preliminary Documentation includes a refined dredging analysis so that:</p>



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a number of mitigation scenarios are assessed to determine whether water quality impacts could be reduced by making adjustments to the dredging methodology;</li><li>• the impact assessment can more accurately predict water quality impacts, rather than relying on worst case predicted impacts; and</li><li>• the amount of fine sediment that will be produced can be quantified and the potential impacts from the fine sediment assessed.</li></ul> <p>The assessment of potential impacts presented in the draft Preliminary Documentation (BMT Eastern Australia Pty Ltd 2018) is a refined assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the Project, with several improvements to the modelling and assessment methodology compared to the previous assessment in the Project referral. These improvements are detailed in the draft Preliminary Documentation and include greater emphasis on the potential water quality impacts to habitats (coral and seagrass) to address flow-on effects to Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES).</p> <p>Dredge and tailwater plume impacts are assessed by analysing spatial representations of the modelled increase in turbidity and deposition rate percentiles at coral and seagrass habitats. The modelled increases to the turbidity percentiles during the dredging simulation were compared to the threshold values to determine the Zones of Impact and Zone of Influence associated with the plumes. The Zone of High Impact is limited to the directly affected dredging footprint. There is no Zone of Moderate Impact. The Zone of Low Impact is limited to an area in the near vicinity of the dredging operation. The Zone of Influence of the dredging plumes extends throughout a significant portion of central area of the Port of Gladstone. The definition of impact zones, the derivation of threshold values and the updated impact assessment methodology is presented in detail in the BMT Eastern Australia Pty Ltd 2018 report.</p> <p>Based on modelled suspended sediment concentrations and sediment deposition rates, it is predicted that seagrass and coral habitats are unlikely to be significantly affected by sediment generated by dredging and reclamation tailwater releases. Direct or flow-on impacts to threatened or migratory species are not expected. Impacts to aquatic ecosystems and other relevant environmental values are not expected. Overall, in the context of EPBC Act Significant Impact Guidelines, it is expected that the CVIP will not lead to impacts to MNES, especially with the application of appropriate mitigation strategies.</p> <p>Management and mitigation strategies for the CVIP are outlined in the draft Preliminary Documentation including an Environmental Management Plan (Aurecon 2018a) and Environmental Monitoring Procedure (Aurecon 2018b). These documents are based on the outcomes of the impact assessment process and they aim to consolidate the mitigation measures proposed to avoid, minimise and manage potential impacts. Both of these documents have been prepared with technical specialist input.</p> <p>The Environmental Monitoring Procedure details a comprehensive water quality regime with water quality trigger levels and adaptive management strategies taking into account water quality requirements for sensitive receptors, in particular seagrass. The monitoring program consists of before, during and after</p>
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		<p>dredging components. The monitoring program includes real time Benthic Photosynthetic Active Radiation (BPAR) and turbidity monitoring, water quality sampling, coastal seagrass meadow mapping and biomass assessments and tailwater discharge monitoring. The monitoring program incorporates adaptive management for turbidity trigger levels based on baseline data and BPAR thresholds based on seagrass growing season light requirement research. Further detail about the establishment of the triggers and the adaptive management process is included in the Environmental Monitoring Procedure.</p>
3	<p>Port development contributing to pressures on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and the proposal to ban at sea disposal of capital dredging material.</p>	<p>The <i>Sustainable Ports Development Act 2015</i> (the Ports Act) came into effect on 20 November 2015 establishing a legislative framework to balance the protection of the GBR with the development of Queensland's major bulk commodity ports in the GRBWHa including the Port of Gladstone. Through the Ports Act, the Queensland Government is implementing key port-related actions of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan (Reef 2050) managing the long-term protection of the GBR.</p> <p>Amongst other key initiatives, the Ports Act prohibits the sea-based placement of port-related capital dredged material within the GRBWHa. The CVIP complies with the Ports Act by proposing that all dredged material be beneficially reused in the existing Western Basin Reclamation Area (WBRA) for future port land and port industry related use.</p> <p>Master planning for priority ports is another port-related action of Reef 2050 mandated under the Ports Act. Gladstone is the first priority port to have a master plan prepared and finalised. The Port of Gladstone master plan is publicly available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads website. The master plan for the Port of Gladstone ensures port-related development is sustainably managed while protecting the GBR. With the finalisation of the master plan, CVIP is now able to be considered and assessed by the Queensland Government.</p>
4	<p>Release of sediments from the WBRA bund wall contributing to water quality and contaminant impacts.</p>	<p>Sediment quality and water quality has been addressed for the CVIP in this response.</p> <p>It is proposed that the WBRA will be utilised for the placement of material dredged for the CVIP. The WBRA has adequate capacity to receive the volume of dredged material and manage the associated tailwater relevant to the CVIP. Taking into consideration the publicly available Gladstone Bund Wall Independent Review commissioned by the Australian Government, the WBRA will be actively managed during its utilisation for the CVIP.</p>

We appreciate the submission received as part of the public comment period for the draft Preliminary Documentation as the process assists to ensure that the Project undergoes a robust, diligent and transparent assessment. On the basis of the responses that we provide in this letter, no changes have been made to the draft Preliminary Documentation as a result of the public comment process.

Minor changes have been made to the draft Preliminary Documentation to correct administrative errors and reflect the progression of State Government assessment processes. These changes are summarised in Table 3 below and have resulted in a new version (Version 4) of the draft Preliminary Documentation report.



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**Table 3: Summary of administrative amendments made to the draft Preliminary Documentation report**

Item No.	Section Reference.	Change Summary
1	Executive Summary, Paragraph 1, First Sentence.	Clinton Bypass Channel changed to Clinton Channel.
2	1.0 Introduction, Fifth dot point	Environmental Management Plan spelt in full for first in the report rather than using acronym.
3	5.4 State Government Assessment	Content updated as the master plan for the Priority Port of Gladstone has been finalised and applications to the State Government have been submitted since the previous version (Version 3) of the draft Preliminary Documentation report.
4	Part B, 12.0 Referral Information	Section numbering changed from 11 to 12. References to this section updated as required in the text in the report.
5	Part B, 13.0 Referral Attachments	Section numbering changed from 12 to 13. Subheading numbering updated to reflect this change. References to this section updated as required in the text in the report.
6	Entire document	Line spacing consistency reviewed throughout the report.
7	Table of Contents	Table of contents updated to reflect section numbering and line spacing changes.

GPC advises that this letter, together with the updated draft Preliminary Documentation report (Version 4) enclosed and the original referral (EPBC2017/7976), now constitutes the finalised Preliminary Documentation. GPC will display the finalised Preliminary Documentation for public information pursuant to Section 95B(2) of the EPBC Act within 10 business days of this submission for a duration of 10 business days.

We trust that the Department is now able to complete the assessment by Preliminary Documentation process and we look forward to working with you towards an outcome for the CVIP.

Yours sincerely,

**Craig Walker**  
**ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**