

Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook Inc MEDIA RELEASE 06Feb2012

PORT HINCHINBROOK - TELL THE TRUTH !

SILTED CANALS NOT DUE TO NATURAL DISASTER !

Last Friday's Australian tells the story of "Port Hinchinbrook's" 17 year old woes as if they are the result of cyclone Yasi.

The cyclone dumped masses of silt into the channel and it must be dredged to allow public boat-ramp access. (The Australian - Sarah Elks and Rosanne Barrett Feb 03, 2012)

On the contrary - the marina and the boat ramp access were already well-silted before cyclone Yasi - an ongoing, unresolvable problem since 1994, and predicted by science since 1977.

Since the first dredging, "Port Hinchinbrook" access has repeatedly silted up, with numerous well-publicised attempts to have the local ratepayers pay for the dredging costs. These costs are prohibitive because of the unusually high frequency of dredging required.

Regardless of who is to blame for the dreadful decisions of the past, the fact is that there never could have been a viable "all-tide" boat ramp on the Hinchinbrook Channel.

Ms Margaret Moorhouse, Vice President of the Alliance to Save Hinchinbrook said:

"Tell the truth!! Don't try to dupe taxpayers that "Port Hinchinbrook's" silted canals are a natural disaster for which public monies are justified. The siltation problem is emphatically and demonstrably not due to Cyclone Yasi - it's a permanent problem inherent in the site, and always known to be so.

"Before Cyclone Yasi the developer engaged a dredge to clear the canals, only to send it away unused, so why would he now repay the public purse for expenditure he didn't want to make?"

"When the new spoil disposal "pond" is filled, where will the next lot go? No-one has a use for this stuff"

Mrs Margaret Thorsborne, AO, President of ASH, said *"A 1977 Harbours and Marine Department report stated plainly that the site (Oyster Point) was unsuitable for a boat harbour, citing lack of natural deep water, catchment basis, and severe siltation. They recognised these factors as a fatal combination for the building and maintenance of boating facilities, due to prohibitive ongoing costs. The report also said there were more sheltered places for boats during cyclones.*

"In late 1994 the Governor General of Australia intervened, preventing the worst excesses threatening the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, but could not stop the "Port Hinchinbrook" canal estate and marina complex being fast-tracked through the State Coordinator General's Department.

"The boat ramp was the sweetener that blinded the local community to future excessive costs. The 1994 councillors and state members knew the facts but also that they would have no liability for the inevitable long term problems. A lack of technical understanding was no doubt a factor which allowed them to ignore expert advice.

"The Australian Institute of Marine Science had long shown that the muddy bottom is pushed up and down the very shallow and narrow Hinchinbrook Channel every day by strong tidal currents, with minimal flows out. It is a silt trap. The very expensive 7 km-long commercial sugar jetty off Lucinda stands as testament to the prohibitive costs of dredging it."

Mrs Thorsborne said "In 1994 conservationists had tried to tell the public that the site was no good, that the *Deed of Agreement* wasn't worth a cracker, that the costs would all fall back on the taxpayers and local ratepayers. Conservationists tried to defend the public environment and the public purse against the depredations of the white shoe brigade. For our troubles, peaceful demonstrators were beaten up on public land while Queensland Police watched. We ask the media to tell the public the truth - all of it"

CONTACTS

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("The two indomitable Margarets")

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR DEVELOPER QUOTES WANTING PUBLIC TO PAY

EVIDENCE (2005) THAT THE DEVELOPER WANTS THE PUBLIC TO PAY

Developer Keith Williams sited the public boat ramp at the far inner end of the excessively long and wide canal, thus ensuring that present day boat ramp users must take their boats right through the canal estate. As a result, state government and local council can only maintain access to the boat ramp by funding (from the public purse and local rates) the canal estate dredging.

A newsletter from Williams Corp director **Ben Williams** (Port Hinchinbrook Newsletter 15 April 2005) quoted his own letter to Cardwell Shire Council "*your senior staff is great to work with ...*" (p10).

He also asked Port Hinchinbrook residents to write to the council as follows:

"your Council should ... allocate an annual contribution towards the dredging of the Grande Canal and the access channel ..." (p10)

"...such payment can be justified to your ratepayers by stating that such payment is a contribution towards keeping open the access channel for your Council's public boat ramp because we are not asking for a contribution to be used in dredging the marina basin although one third of the basin is public water" ...

".. stipulate a percentage of the general rate ..." ... "... the Port Hinchinbrook marina is not a profitable operation at this point in time and most certainly could not fund the \$500,000 or more which is required for dredging" ... "this letter ... on behalf of Port Hinchinbrook Services Limited which we manage for a fee." (p12)

The newsletter (15 April 2005) also states

"The marina berth owners do pay an annual fee for maintenance but the percentage set aside for dredging would not cover dredging of the seabed beneath the marina at the present time" (p12)

And in a "Port Hinchinbrook" Newsletter 18 April 2005:

"Pressure must be used in convincing the Cardwell Shire Council that they must contribute to dredging of Port Hinchinbrook's waterways ..." (last page).

Only the year before (2004) a Courier Mail article "**Developer revives breakwater project**" stated

"Cardwell Mayor Joe Galeano said ... application would be at no cost to ratepayers ... "Keith said he would never ask Council to dredge to keep the canals open, and we're holding him to his word on that" Cr Galeano said. Mr Williams said ... "Cardwell Council ... has never spent one cent on [Port Hinchinbrook] ..."

Shortly after the breakwalls were built (2006), the whole "Port Hinchinbrook" canal system was dredged. The developer again sought to reassure residents:

"Mr Williams also rejected Ms Moorhouse's assertion that Cardwell Shire ratepayers were at risk should there be a cost blow-out or should expensive remedial work become necessary" ("ASH cans marina", Townsville Bulletin, 04 Jan 2007).

Despite the acknowledgements that "Port Hinchinbrook" residents are fully responsible for dredging expenses, in August 2007 the residents tried to pass them on to the local council (**Port Hinchinbrook residents want Council to take over** - Tully Times 16 August 2007). Fortunately for the shire's other ratepayers, Council refused, relying on the legal agreement by which the development had been approved, and not wanting to burden ratepayers with Keith Williams' estimate of "\$600 thousand dollars a year to dredge the channel" (Hinchinbrook decision paves the way for rock wall development, **ABC farnorth/stories**, Thursday, 19 October 2006).

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