



Gladstone Conservation Council Inc.

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19th September 2014

GPC offset strategy projects update – GREAN 18th September 2014

To: Megan Ellis
Gladstone Ports Corporation

Megan,

Thank you for the GPC offsets strategy update at yesterday's GREAN meeting.

I would like to apologise for any distress I may have caused you but feel that my line of engagement was most certainly not off topic.

Though I fully understand your inclination to do so, it was unfortunate that you chose not to engage with the matters I tried to raise in the GREAN forum. It denied us an opportunity to establish common ground on what will continue to be a contentious issue.

It is important to state my position clearly.

You declared that the offsets under discussion were those of the Western Basin Dredging and Disposal Project. The offsets of course are at its core a biodiversity preservation objective aimed at balancing the adverse impacts of the proponent's actions. The underlying principle being a "no net loss" to the biodiversity sustaining ecology.

I tried to review the loading of the balance with you, for the benefit of the community forum we were in.

On the "loss" side of the equation, at its most obvious is the material change of the bund footprint from seagrass meadow to dredge spoil dump. It is semantics to argue with me that seagrass is ephemeral; it does not change the fact that the bund footprint area was identified in the WBDDP EIS as the most contiguous seagrass cover, based on a 2002 seagrass survey. It is irrelevant that belatedly Pelican Banks are now hailed as the principal seagrass meadow in the Dugong protection area. That would have been better raised in the EIS when the decision makers were contorting themselves to approve the dredging. The fact remains that substantial areas with the capacity to generate seagrass meadow were lost due to the WBDDP. Lost from formally declared Dugong protection area within world heritage listed water.

...and what is the offset offered?

My notes from your presentation:

- Go slow in sensitive areas - no legislative power (consultants paid)
- Tangle bins GRC initiative (consultants paid)
- Turtle CPR (cart them to help quickly??)
- Marine rehab facility (Bob's deep pockets)
- Fencing, clean-up, areas needing rehab
- Resilience improvement coral habitat, survey/consultants paid
- Moorings, environmentally friendly swivel posts, consultants paid
- Fish habitat consultancy studies, fish surveys
- Stormwater litter reduction initiatives
- Water quality improvement. Not GPC but FBA??
- Buy land to protect from development
 - only one target, a block on Keppel Island
- Interactive pdf on GPC web site



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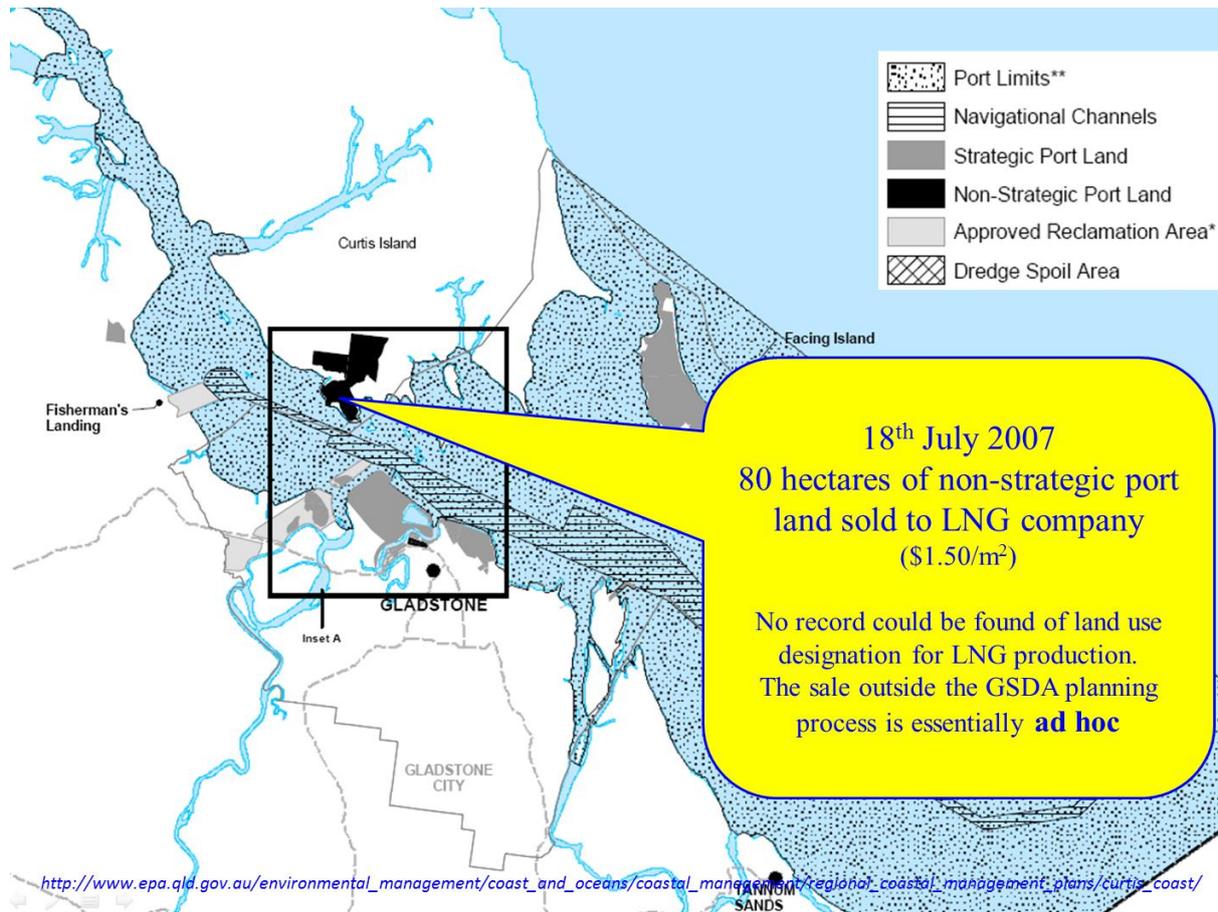
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It is important to note that the gazumping of GBWHA for industrial development was ad hoc and contrived and there is an ethical question that arises from subsequently using the mess created to justify environmental offsets.



So what are the tangible benefits of GPC's offset strategy projects? I acknowledge your candour when you declared that GPC "...have to spend five million dollars" but then was also told that you felt you may not be authorised to declare what had been spent thus far. A basic question of course remains, how does paying consultants translate to tangible environmental benefits of equivalent and opposite scale to that represented by the permanent loss of the seagrass meadows?

You told us there are many aspects to the offsets, not just what we were discussing. Perhaps you could revisit that with us and give us a fuller overview of that in ecological terms. I am most interested to learn which specific "development" objectives were set aside and how they no longer represent a threat to the GBRWH property. Not just poly speak, such as the promise of unenforceable go-slow zones, but real and effective barriers to the sort of damage GPC have shown themselves capable of inflicting on our world heritage.

Sincerely,

Jan Arens

President – Gladstone Conservation Council