

Background material

For preparing submissions to Supplementary EIS for proposed Shute Harbour apartment and marina project.



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! NOT SHUTE HARBOUR TOO!

www.saveourforeshore.com.au

- Save Our Foreshore believe that a **development proposed for Shute Harbour** on the Whitsunday mainland will have adverse economic, social and environmental effects both locally and, in a broader context, on the World Heritage values of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
- A lease for a large resort, residential complex and marina has been in existence for nearly thirty years. The project, if approved, would be built largely over reclaimed World Heritage seabed.
- If ever completed, it would be located within the waters of Shute Harbour. It is in a World Heritage area, a National Heritage area, A Great Barrier Reef Coastal Marine Park, a Habitat Protection Zone and an Area of State Significance. It is enclosed by the Conway Range wilderness, Mt Rooper National Park and the waters and islands of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
- It would require initial dredging to create access channels, the marina basin and reclaimed land for construction and ongoing dredging to maintain the access channels and marina basin. Dredge spoil would be stored on site.
- There have been no attempts to assess the cumulative impact of this proposal and others along the GBR and no comprehensive attempt to understand the resultant hydrological effects of the proposal on the wider area of Shute Bay.

■ It would mean the destruction of significant areas of seagrass, mangroves and benthic communities and would seriously threaten water quality, inshore coral reefs, fish breeding nurseries, dugong and turtle grazing areas and cetacean populations.

■ In 2003 the proposal was submitted to the Queensland Coordinator General as a 'significant project' requiring an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under Section 26(1)(a) of the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 (Qld).

■ Since 2006 the term lease has been extended seven times. DNR&M finally refused a renewal on February 24th 2013 and immediately on February 26th issued a Permit to Occupy for 'exploratory purposes.' Given the proponent has had ten years to do exploratory work, it begs the question why the department felt inclined to give them another twelve months.

■ In 2008 an EIS was delivered to the Queensland coordinator general by the current proponent. There were over 300 submissions made by interested parties within a six week response period. The co-ordinator general subsequently requested that a Supplementary EIS (SEIS) be prepared by May 2009. Since then the proponent has failed to meet numerous deadlines for the SEIS.

■ The project has also been determined to be a controlled action pursuant to the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

"Approval under the EPBC act is required for any action occurring within or outside a declared World Heritage property that has, will have, or is likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of the World Heritage Property."

"An action is likely to have a significant impact on the World Heritage values of a declared World Heritage property if there is a real chance or possibility that it will cause:

- 1. one or more of the World Heritage values to be lost;*
- 2. one or more of the World Heritage values to be degraded or damaged; or*
- 3. one or more of the World Heritage values to be notably altered, modified, obscured or diminished."*

■ The state government's recently released Queensland Coastal Plan has included the SHMD site as a Designated Maritime Development Area (MDA).

"Maritime development areas have been designated in the Queensland Coastal Plan for medium to large-scale maritime infrastructure .Proactively designating appropriate areas for this kind of development serves two purposes. It provides greater certainty for proponents and the community on the locations for maritime development, and it protects these areas from non-coastal dependent development."

While these MDAs may be protected from 'non coastal development' they appear to have been created to facilitate and expedite any so called 'coastal dependent development.' It appears that once an area is designated MDA many of the environmental protections included in the Coastal Plan are simply stripped away.

■ The SEIS was finally made available for public comment on March 16th 2013. It is clear from this that the proponents have no intention of actually constructing this facility.

The SEIS list of **Project Objectives** includes:

*“To provide a world class **integrated** marina and tourism facility...”*

*“to provide a balanced, **master planned** marina resort environment.”*

Closer examination of the document confirms that this proposal would **not** be ‘integrated’ or ‘master-planned’ by the proponent, as implied, but, **after reclamation of the World Heritage seabed, would be on-sold to several unspecified, third party developers, as freehold blocks of land, to use more or less as they see fit.** (for more details see: *Shute Harbour. The Real Story.*)

■ The Shute Harbour lease has existed for some thirty years and yet proponents have never been able to fulfil the requirements of their Terms of Reference and establish there is ‘demand’ for the facility – berths and built form. This is because there *is* no demand in this region currently. Not for berths. Not for expensive apartments. Berths sit empty in several of the regional marinas and unsold, high-end apartments are still plentiful in Airlie Beach. And so they plan to on-sell the newly created land and make it somebody else’s responsibility.

The Whitsunday community does not need to be exposed to yet another costly, disruptive and destructive exercise so that a private developer can indulge in a waterfront, land grab at our irreplaceable Shute Harbour. Following is compelling evidence to support this contention:

■ The Whitsunday Regional Council has voted six to one against the SHMD proposal going ahead. They, more than anyone and through bitter experience, are acutely aware of the cost to the community of these commercially impractical and inappropriate schemes.

■ Several residential/marina complexes have gone into receivership in Queensland over the past few years. There are two in our Whitsunday mainland area alone. The debacle at Port of Airlie cost our council and therefore our community many thousands of dollars.

■ Ten years ago the Port of Airlie developer promised the community, among other things, a major resort in exchange for the loss of their precious Coconut Grove environment. Ten years later the developer, Meridien, is in receivership, the project has cost our council and therefore our community many thousands of dollars, the area is a vast, unsightly, unused paddock and the community is still waiting with no resolution in sight.

■ The nearby Abel Point marina, which Meridien bought for around \$75million, was sold recently for some \$28million. A write down of nearly \$50million. And yet the Shute Harbour proponent would have us believe their unfunded \$252 million (or more) project is financially viable!

■ A major \$500million “integrated resort” and residential development over 25 hectares was commenced around 2007 at Funnel Bay between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. In 2009 the developer went into administration, leaving yet another unsightly, unfinished, unoccupied precinct. The frequently used public access of the past, to the public beach and foreshore, has for several years been rendered virtually impossible. Although the land has finally been on-sold (having been on the market for over three years), it remains desolate and there appears to be no sign of anything happening in the location any time soon.

■ Laguna Quays was another vast ‘master-planned’ precinct with plans for houses, shops and all sorts of other ‘public infrastructure’. In spite of the best efforts of major Melbourne developer David Marriner, the dream was never fully realised and today the resort and marina lie deserted, crumbling and overgrown.

■ Since Cyclone Yasi devastated Port Hinchinbrook and its marina and left many boats destroyed or damaged the place has been in a state of major disrepair and now the private owners are demanding that the state government bail them out. Surely a better option is not to risk these potentially disastrous developments in the first place.

■ Insurance and legal liabilities relating to climate events and storm surge – particularly in these cyclone prone, waterfront areas – become more complex and perilous by the day. Strata title insurance in North Queensland seems, even now, to be virtually impossible to achieve and appears to have a deeply troubled future.

■ The coastal devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy on the US East Coast, including the destruction of several marinas, is just one more example of the ill advised nature of the SHMD proposal.

■ A petition against the SHMD tabled by SOF at Airlie market over no more than four or five Saturday mornings collected around 2700 signatures opposed to the proposal.

■ UNESCO in their recent ‘state of the Reef’ report referred by name to the issues at Shute Harbour and have expressed their concerns about the ongoing dredging, destruction of mangroves, seagrasses, corals etc and declining water quality.

■ Professor Jon Nott of JCU Cairns warns that, as a result of Climate Change, Queensland will become subject to more frequent and more violent cyclones. At a time when governments and councils globally are making a strategic withdrawal from low lying coastal development and its liability and insurance issues, our government appears to be actively supporting this development on reclaimed seabed!

■ The Shute Harbour project is symptomatic of the tendency of successive Queensland governments to favour short term commercial interests over the long term survival of the Great Barrier Reef. Over the years, as science has learnt more and more about the fragility of this unique eco-system, there have been many opportunities to terminate this project. It is a grave failure of vision from governments at all levels that this has not yet been done.

■ **Supplementary EIS Submissions must be in by April 29 2013.** While the project's proposed footprint is a little smaller than that of 2008, the change is essentially cosmetic and all the principal economic, social and environmental objections to its approval remain in place.

If we are to stop this inappropriate proposal from proceeding we need as many people as possible to make a submission against it to the coordinator general before the end of April. Information on the process, how to respond and links to the SEIS are available at: <http://www.dsip.qld.gov.au/assessments-and-approvals/shute-harbour-marina.html>