

Cairns Post – **opinion**weekend

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EIS backflip a big query

News the State Government is reconsidering an expanded dredging program in Trinity Inlet will be most welcome by Cairns business groups – or “the big end of town” as some like to call it.

But the decision surely begs the questions: What’s the point of all this flip-flopping?

Why do we need more studies on top of the multiple ones already carried out?

How will the recently-announced “revised” environmental impact statement suddenly come back with a different conclusion to the EIS released in April?

If it does, what was the point of the first EIS?

That original EIS advised more extensive dredging of the inlet would be too costly and not environmentally friendly.

At a cost of \$5.1 million over many months, taxpayers are entitled to expect that it was money well spent. The more cynical in the community will be watching with interest.

If the revised EIS suddenly comes back with a favourable opinion of increased dredging, surely this raises suggestions the government is advising its consultants what outcome they should find rather than merely letting the science do the talking.

In April, the State Labor Government steadfastly backed the EIS but Treasurer Curtis Pitt did not completely rule out researching ways to allow the Cairns Port to expand.

In contrast, Member for Cairns, Rob Pyne posted a Facebook comment applauding the adverse findings of the EIS and the blow it represented to “the big end of town”.

Some members of the so-called “big end of town” have joined forces to form Cairns Port Development Inc.

They have been strongly lobbying for Cairns and Mourilyan to be named “priority ports” by the State Government and have started placing ads urging people to sign a petition to support increased dredging and development.

They also advocate dumping dredge spoil at East Trinity with a view to allowing the area to be developed. If the revised EIS suddenly backs their dredging vision, this is a cause for a major spike in business confidence but a huge dip in the government’s credibility.

Ports North will also be somewhat vindicated because they have also commissioned detailed and expensive environmental studies which appear to have been completely ignored. One wonders if the reason for this is because their findings paint dredging in a positive light and that’s not what the government wanted to hear.