

Matt Canavan takes chopper over port amid calls for new dredge suburb

Chris Calcino, The Cairns Post

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DREDGING supporters have dusted off calls for East Trinity to be transformed into a new residential suburb built atop huge amounts of spoil scooped from the bed of Trinity Inlet.

Members of the Cairns Port Development group took Senator Matt Canavan and the *Cairns Post* on a helicopter tour of the city to point out potential sites where dredge spoil could be dumped.

Well-known authority on the issue Norm Whitney rejected the notion East Trinity was an environmentally important natural wetland, pointing to a photos from 1988 showing it was covered by cane farms, grazing land and a healthy melaleuca forest.



This photo of East Trinity in 1988 shows the area was covered by cane farms and melaleuca forest. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

Hundreds of those trees now stand dead and leafless in artificial stagnant ponds.

“Compare that to the present environmental mess we overlooked where the now - former high-and-dry farming land is overgrown with secondary growth vegetation and weeds and is a habitat for feral pigs and other vermin,” Mr Whitney said.

A CSIRO study found the lower sections of East Trinity were 1.4m lower than the original land level.

The group appealed to Mr Canavan to use his political influence to have Cairns classed as a priority port and the original 4.4 million cubic-metre capital dredging plan to be reinstated rather than the current scaled-back version.



A dead melaleuca forest now sits in stagnant water at East Trinity. PICTURE: CHRIS CALCINO

“The port has to be determined to be a strategic port and the dredging be able to continue as necessary,” Mr Whitney said.

“The present dredging program must only be classified as Stage 1 of the total project.”

Maintenance dredging is already undertaken annually but Down Under Cruise and Dive managing director Peppi Iovanella said it barely touched the surface.

He pointed out yachts and small boats actually avoiding the path set by floating leads directing users to the supposedly safest channel to the port, despite maintenance dredging being carried out just last week.

“It’s a joke. It’s not really dredging and it’s not safe. It’s not even maintenance dredging. It’s negligible,” he said.

“Forget the cruise ships, even the local operation is a problem. I don’t totally blame Ports North. All their money goes down to Brisbane.”

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre and Ports North could not be reached for comment.

PLEDGE TO ACT

FEDERAL Minister for Northern Australia Senator Matt Canavan has pledged to take up the fight for a more comprehensive dredging scheme and further development of Port of Cairns.

“The port development is crucial to the future of the Cairns economy, especially to ensure it builds a diverse and resilient economy,” he said.

“I will take up the issues raised by Cairns Port Development with the Queensland Government and Ports North.”