

# Cairns Post readers back dredging for bigger cruise ships

By Chris Calcino, The Cairns Post, 19 July 2018

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IF POLITICIANS are waiting for a mandate to ramp up dredging in Trinity Inlet, they have it now.

Four years.

Three polls.

No change in opinion.

The *Cairns Post's* recent Your Say on the Far North Reader Survey asked if the current dredging program should be expanded to allow bigger ships full of tourists to dock.

An overwhelming 80 per cent of respondents backed the idea, in almost perfect synchrony with previous independent appraisals.

Compass Research conducted a random survey ahead of the 2016 local government elections and discovered 82.5 per cent of residents supported deepening the shipping channel.

A couple of years earlier, another Compass survey commissioned by Ports North found 78 per cent of people supported dredging.

The key difference this time is that dredging has been approved – subject to a protracted business case from Building Queensland – but not to a satisfactory degree for Far Northerners.

Cairns Regional Council Mayor Bob Manning believed politics, not economic and environmental realities, had triggered the current scaled-down 1 million cubic metre dredging plan.

The 2014 study for the Newman government's since-abandoned 4.4 million cubic metre proposal found dredge spoil could be placed at a depth of 28.7m with basically no dispersal – even in cyclonic conditions.

“Dredge material deposited at that level does not move,” Cr Manning said.

“Here's a case where the doctor says this is the diagnosis but we're not going to treat you accordingly.”

Cairns Shipping Development Inc spokeswoman Emma Thirkell hoped Building Queensland was taking so long on the business case because it had realised the current proposal to cap cruise ships at 300m in length would be a wasted opportunity.

“I hope they might be allowing a redesign of the channel so they can get the Voyager class in,” she said.

“They’re up to 320m long.

“To tack on a bit more doesn’t have to be expensive.

“We would still work on getting the Reef 2050 Plan amended because of what that does to investor confidence.

“But at least it becomes less urgent.”

Proponents for a return to the original, quadrupled-in-scale project say the Federal Government is not free of blame, with its Reef 2050 plan banning placing capital dredge spoils at sea.

“It has to be amended,” Ms Thirkell said.

“It’s due for revision in 2019, and we will be advocating on behalf of the city to get it changed – you just can’t put this economic cap on the city.”