

Ports North net profit of \$16.1 million for 2017/18 financial year

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THRIVING trade and steady tourism have doubled Ports North's net profit over 12 months, prompting calls for Trinity Inlet dredging to be listed as a priority project.

The corporation recorded a \$16.1 million net profit at June 30, compared with \$8.8 million last year.

Ports North chairman Russell Beer said the corporation had been actively targeting trade "rather than just waiting for it to come in".

"We're seeing a lot more commercial activity through the port, more than we've probably seen for about 60 or 70 years," Mr Beer said.

Cargo for the Mt Emerald Wind Farm and Rio Tinto's Amrun (Weipa) mine projects has increased Ports North's trade revenue, resulting in a \$3.5 million boost in the underlying operating result.

The port also secured the contract as the supply port for cargo for the new \$75 million green energy power plant at the Arriga sugar mill.

"Because we've demonstrated the capacity to deal in those large infrastructure components people are now looking at our port in a different light," Mr Beer said. "We've got people chasing us now."

An increase in super yacht and cruise visits also helped. Mr Beer said the loss of the *Pacific Eden*'s home port in Cairns shouldn't adversely affect next year's figures.

"The cruise ship isn't one of the key drivers to our profitability," Mr Beer said.

Cairns Port Development president Ron Crew said it was important to upgrade facilities to keep it financially healthy.

"We have Northern Australia's most used port ... and we seem to get left behind all the time," he said, adding that the dredging needed to be a priority project.

Ports North has been allowed to retain this year's dividends – normally paid to the State Government – as partial contribution to dredging costs.

Following approval of the environmental impact statement, Ports North is working to obtain all relevant approvals to move the dredging project to the construction phase.

Mr Beer said work could start after the wet season.

"A couple of years ago there were less than 20 vessels coming in; now we have more than 60, so the trajectory is in the right direction," he said.

"We expect by the middle of the 2020 decade we'll be seeing up to 150 cruise ships visiting here a year."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Assets up by \$20.1 million to \$77.9 million at the end of the 2017-18 financial year, driven by an improved trading performance.

Liabilities increased from \$12.9 million to \$17.8 million at June 30, mainly due to a current tax liability because of improved profitability and higher trade payables.

Cairns remains a sought-after destination for cruise ships, with 58 of the vessels berthing at the Port of Cairns during 2017-18.