

# New plan avoids mud dumping in Barrier Reef Park

September 8 2014

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In this Nov. 2002 file photo provided by Queensland Tourism, an unidentified woman snorkels on the Great Barrier Reef off Australia's Queensland state. The government of Australia's Queensland state approved a plan Monday, Sept. 8, 2014, that will prevent 3 million cubic meters (106 million cubic feet) of seabed mud from being dumped in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. (AP Photo/Queensland Tourism, File) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

The government of Australia's Queensland state approved a plan Monday that will prevent 3 million cubic meters (106 million cubic feet)

of seabed mud from being dumped in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The state-owned North Queensland Bulk Ports Corp., or NQBP, already has federal approval to dump dredged sediment in the marine park in order to expand the Abbot Point coal port near the town of Bowen, a decision that environmentalists say will endanger one of the world's most fragile ecosystems.

But Queensland Premier Campbell Newman announced Monday that his Cabinet ministers had approved a new disposal plan that would have the material reused on land.

"(It) will create a win-win situation. It will protect the unique values of the Great Barrier Reef and allow for the staged development of the important port of Abbot Point," Newman said in a statement.

The state government has asked federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt, who approved the Abbot Point expansion in 2013, to fast-track approval for the new plan.

The government hopes the new disposal plan will ensure the Abbot Point expansion can begin on schedule.

NQBP will carry out the dredging on behalf of proponents Adani and GVK Hancock. Adani wants the work to begin in June 2015.

Last week, NQBP said it was looking at alternative disposal options due to a legal challenge by an environmental group against dumping the material at sea.



In this Sept. 2001 file photo provided by Queensland Tourism, the Great Barrier Reef off Australia's Queensland state is shown in an aerial view. The government of Australia's Queensland state approved a plan Monday, Sept. 8, 2014, that will prevent 3 million cubic meters (106 million cubic feet) of seabed mud from being dumped in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. (AP Photo/Queensland Tourism, File)

Queensland's port authority said proponents feared the court case could hold up the expansion of the port by up to two years.

Outraged conservationists say the already fragile reef would be gravely threatened by the dredging, which was to occur over a 184-hectare (455-acre) area. Apart from the risk that the sediment would smother coral and sea grass, the increased shipping traffic would boost the risk of

accidents, such as oil spills and collisions with delicate coral beds, environment groups argue.

In a 2012 report, the U.N.'s cultural agency, UNESCO—which includes the marine park among its World Heritage sites—expressed concern about development along the reef, including ports. It warned that the [marine park](#) was at risk of being included on a list of World Heritage sites that are in danger.

A decision to add the Great Barrier Reef to that list has been held off for a year, after UNESCO said in June that Australia had made progress in protecting it.

UNESCO's World Heritage Center has asked Australia to submit an updated report on the state of conservation of the site by February 2015.

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Citation: New plan avoids mud dumping in Barrier Reef Park (2014, September 8) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-mud-dumping-barrier-reef.html>

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