UQ prof says city suits a mega-port

Marine expert backs ‘logical’ idea but questions cost to families and fishing

DAVID SPARKES talks to Greg Skilleter and reports the prof’s views on environmental management

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Big port ‘focuses’ resources

David Sparkes
Senior Reporter

A marine expert says a small number of mega-ports in the Great Barrier Region could make more sense than lots of medium ports.

University of Queensland Professor Greg Skilleter is an expert on the effects of humans on estuarine and marine biodiversity.

Yesterday he was asked about another scientist’s suggestion that having well-managed mega-ports could allow better conservation of Queensland’s dugong habitats.

Prof Skillet was not calling for Gladstone to become a mega-port, but he said there was logic in the suggestion.

“There are some obvious benefits to doing that,” he said.

“It focuses the effort of the management where it needs to happen, rather than spreading the resources for monitoring, policing and enforcement up along the coast.”

“Do you accept that you are going to write-off that area?”

He said if the decision was made to focus on having well-managed mega-ports, Gladstone was a logical choice depending on perspective.

“Given the existing size of Gladstone... (it) is a very logical place to select, but is that fair to the people and the families who rely on fishing?”

“My personal view would be Gladstone is an excellent deep water port; it is close to the infrastructure.

“There has already been massive commitment to doing that in Gladstone, so it makes sense that that be a place that you could do that, rather than picking a new place and starting there.”

Professor Skilleter said that logic could only work if there was excellent management. He was highly critical of environmental management of Gladstone Harbour.

He said in general ports were harmful. “There’s a whole suite of problems that arise from ports,” he said. “It doesn’t matter how well they are managed.”

PROTECTION: Scientists suggest having well-managed mega-ports could allow better conservation of Queensland’s dugong habitats.

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