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PPCC Inc. Policy Statement No. 17

Limitation of port development in Port Phillip and Western Port

SUMMARY:

Port Phillip and Western Port Bays are Crown land held in perpetual trust for the people. They are a community asset of critical value to the people of Melbourne and its environs and should be protected, conserved and managed by Governments, for the people, as their ecological, aesthetic, recreational and ambience values are a rare, finite and indispensable part of those environs.

Australia's large container port expansions have consumed and degraded large sections of high ecological value coastal land. Largely taxpayer funded works have been justified by promised economic and social benefits, however unlike the perpetual benefits the people get from a publicly-enjoyed coastal and marine environment, these promised benefits have proved illusory and unsatisfying. Alternative infrastructure and logistics solutions to ongoing port expansion must be found.

DETAIL:

Port operations contribute to lost amenity, marine pest invasions, reduced water and air quality, and traffic congestion. The 2014 proposals for a new port at Point Wilson (advocated by the ALP) or an expanded Port of Hastings (advocated by the Coalition) are driven by shipping industry demands for deeper draught vessels, carrying more containers, and a cargo-cult vision reliant on a very large increase in consumption and population growth. Project plans rely on an increase of some 350% in Victoria's container throughput by 2050, whilst the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates a 60-70% population increase by then.

Government policy has moved Australia well into the global market, and yet Victoria's port expansion proposals seek to entrench petty interstate rivalries based on which State will get the largest share of international container trade. However, Australia is already well served by ports around our entire coastline, and many substantial ports are closer to our major Asian trading partners.

As trade and transport are national issues, rather than the present state based port operations, there should be a national approach to transport infrastructure planning, including ports and rail. National plans should then be underpinned by an ecologically based investigation of Australia's population, consumption and infrastructure carrying capacity.

To address present inefficiencies of state based competition, port and rail infrastructure should either remain in public ownership with oversight by a National Transport Authority or be re-nationalised.

Alternative infrastructure solutions could then include:

- Larger ships could load/unload at Hub port Singapore, or existing deep ports (Darwin, Fremantle, Brisbane etc.) all closer to Australia's present major Asian trading partners
- Running smaller fuel efficient ships to and from those ports
- Much more interstate rail and 'inland ports' (Brisbane/Melbourne rail link, Parkes Inland Port etc.)
- Ports could diversify assets, invest in rail and joint port operations.

ADOPTION: This PPCC Inc. Policy Statement No. 17 was adopted by a General Meeting of Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc. on 20th April 2015.
