

Senator Larissa Waters, Australian Greens environment spokesperson, spoke about environmental disaster at Gladstone Harbour on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef.

“To expand Gladstone Harbour for coal and gas export, the federal government approved 46 million cubic metres of dredging with 11 million cubic metres of that dredge spoil dumped offshore in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area,” Senator Waters said.

“Following this large-scale dredging program, we saw unprecedented levels of fish kills and diseased dolphins and turtles.

“The disaster has crippled the local fishing industry, as consumers are understandably wary.

“Unfortunately both the state and federal governments do not seem to have learned from this tragic mistake.

“They are on the verge of approving five new or expanded coal and gas ports along the Queensland coast, which will see the Great Barrier Reef turned into a dumping ground for dredge spoil.

“If current proposals go ahead, it’s estimated that every hour one and a half ships will travel through this World Heritage Area.

“The increased frequency of shipping will inevitably put this delicate ecosystem at greater risk of maritime accidents.

“Potential shipping accidents would have disastrous impacts, especially given these large ships will be laden with coal and gas and that the Reef is a global environmental icon.

“What’s more, the Queensland Government hasn’t ruled out the potential of shipping uranium through the Reef.

“For all of these reasons, it’s alarming that pilotage is only compulsory in parts of the Reef.

“The Australian Greens agree with The Australasian Marine Pilots Institute that this is completely unacceptable.

“The Great Barrier Reef is already under significant strain, with the World Heritage Committee warning it could be added to the international in-danger list within a year, if it continues to be overrun with mining development.

“It’s vital that we take the necessary precautions to ensure that shipping is as safe as possible so as not to put this globally unique environment under even more pressure,” Senator Waters said.