



**Media Release - 31 March 2010**

**Xstrata coal port for Fitzroy River Delta – not in our backyard!**

Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC) will strongly oppose Xstrata's plans to build a large coal export terminal on Balaclava Island in the mouth of the Fitzroy River. The extensive tidal delta is a natural system containing mangrove forests, saltmarsh flats and wetlands of high environmental value. It is completely unsuitable for an industrial coal port.

CCC believes that dredging required for coal ships and loading wharfs, coal stockpiles, washdown facilities, rail terminal and construction of an artificial causeway from dredge waste would completely alter the tidal dynamics and unique ecosystem functioning of the island, its surrounding estuaries and protected fish habitat areas.

'The community needs to know about the magnitude of Xstrata's plans and the potential impact they will have on Keppel Bay and the Fitzroy River,' says CCC spokesperson, Janet Barrett.

'A telling indication of just how devastating this project could be is the federal government's stipulation that Xstrata address almost the entire list of matters relating to 'national environmental significance'. This doesn't happen very often.'

The Fitzroy Delta is a commercially-important fish nursery and a contributor to marine productivity. Unique salt marshes and algal mats store nutrients vital for prawns, crabs, molluscs and fish. On seasonal high tides these nutrients are flushed into estuarine channels sustaining a dynamic and complex food service for many species including large numbers of waterbirds.

'Recent marine research has uncovered a sizable population of threatened snubfin dolphins which inhabit the Fitzroy River and the immediate vicinity of Balacalava Island. We are really concerned about how these dolphins will cope with not just the loss of their saltmarsh food sources and mangrove habitat but also with any reduction in water quality. Noise and ship movements are also going to be big problems,' says Ms Barrett.

CCC believes the environmental and social costs of constructing a coal port in the Fitzroy River Delta will far exceed any economic benefit the local community might reap.