PACIFIC MARINE GROUP PTY LTD
AUSTRALIA

12 December 2025

Submission – Inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia

Term of Reference: Barge Landings and Marine Access for remote communities

Pacific Marine Group (PMG) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia's Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries Across Northern Australia. As a leading marine construction and services company with more than three decades of operational experience across Northern Australia; including Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, as well as through the pacific, PMG has firsthand insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping the region's industrial future.

Our operations span marine infrastructure construction, project support for defence and resource industries, commercial diving services, vessel charter, and underwater inspections.

At PMG, we employ a diverse workforce across regional and remote northern communities and ar well versed in collaborating closely with First Nations groups, government agencies, ports, and private sector partners.

Northern Australia's economic trajectory will be shaped by its ability to harness emerging industries such as clean/ renewable energy, critical minerals, defence and sovereign capability, aquaculture expansion, and decarbonisation technologies. PMG submits this document to contribute practical, industry-informed recommendations that support sustainable and competitive development.

Overview of Key Challenges in Preparing for Emerging Industries

A key term of reference for this inquiry is the role of **barge landings and marine access for remote communities**, which serve as lifeline infrastructure across Northern Australia. PMG's operational experience in remote coastal and island regions; including the Torres Strait, and Cape York Peninsula, demonstrates that reliable marine access underpins not only emerging industries but also essential services, supply chains, emergency response, and community wellbeing.

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Critical Importance of Barge Landings to Remote Communities

Remote communities depend on barge landings for:

- Freight and fuel delivery where sealed road access is unavailable.
- Construction materials for community housing and essential infrastructure.
- Emergency resupply during floods, cyclones, and road closures.
- Support of local industries such as aquaculture, tourism, and small-scale manufacturing.

Many existing barge ramps and landings are ageing, undersized, or exposed to environmental conditions that disrupt supply chains. This lack of reliability increases community costs, limits economic growth, and restricts the viability of emerging industries in remote regions.

A good example of this is the Seisia Jetty (including the dolphin structures) and the barge ramp, which are currently in an unviable condition. The Seisia facility is a vital transport link for the Northern Peninsula Area and the Torres Strait, used by supply vessels, barges, and ferries to move cargo, vehicles, and passengers. The ramp and jetty also support the local tourism sector by providing access for cruise ships, tour operators, and general travel to the Great Barrier Reef islands and Thursday Island.

PMG is currently tendering for these remedial works with Maritime Safety and believes that this targeted investment will support continued, and additional growth in the region.

Infrastructure Gaps and Port Capacity Constraints

Beyond major ports, the smaller-scale coastal access infrastructure; barge ramps, jetties, pontoons, and sheltered loading areas; often presents greater operational limitations. Key challenges include:

- Insufficient all-tide access.
- Landing structures damaged by cyclones or erosion.
- Lack of navigational markers for safe barge approach.
- Insufficient dredging to maintain access channels.
- Limited staging and laydown areas for freight transfer.

Another strong example of this was seen during recent work PMG carried out in and around Lockhart River. It became evident that the port area lacked adequate shelter, making crew transfers and bunkering difficult and often subject to delays.

Australia, with the world’s largest pipeline of hydrogen projects, is well positioned to become a major exporter, particularly in North Queensland, with vast land areas world-class wind, solar, and tidal resources and within proximity to major Asian markets such as Japan, South Korea, china and Singapore. Currently Ports of Townsville and Gladstone have been identified as key hydrogen export hubs for this purpose, though as we prepare for emerging industries it is vital that government considers the marine access infrastructure required to support this activity In other areas of Northern Australia.

PMG Recommended Barge Ramp Design Considerations

- Suitable for use by both (1) tug and dumb barge operations, and (2) landing craft (self powered barges). See example photographs fo these 2 typical coastal barging operations below:

(1) Tug and Barge operation - Palm Island Barge Ramp. Note tug is used to push barge onto the concrete barge ramp, then the bow door is lowered. A set of fender piles along the port (left) side of barge align the barge onto the ramp

(2) Landing Craft operation - Stephens Island - Torres Strait

- Typical tug and barge operations in Northern Australian waters would be a dumb barge (unpowered flat top barge) 54m x 18m barge drafting up to 2.8m. This barge would typically be towed by a tugboat around 26m long drafting around 2.8m also. The tug would typically tow the barge to the barge ramp location, then reposition to push the barge onto the barge ramp in a configutation similar to the photograph (1) on previous page. Pacific Marine Group has a number of these style of tug and barge sets

https://www.pacificmarinegroup.com.au/marine-fleet/vessels-barges/

- Typical landing craft operations In Northern Australia would utilise craft around 40m, beam 9m and drafting around 2.5m. Pacific Marine Group does not have this style of vessel In our fleet, but Seaswift operates many of these craft In Northern Waters.

https://www.seaswift.com.au/about-us/fleet/landing-craft/

- The barge ramp would typically be fitted with tubular steel fender piles or berthing dolphins down one side to align the barge and therefore the barge door on the ramp.

- Barge ramp would typically be angled concrete, adequately sized to resist the design loads of the operation and unloading equipment, with adequate hardstand available at the top of the barge ramp for unloading and staging of materials.

- Barge ramp unloading pocket (where the vessel sits during unloading) would typically be dredged to allow vessels being unloaded to sit all through the tide cycle without the tug and barge (1) or the landing craft (2) touching the seabed.

- It is always preferable for the entrance channel to be also dredged to allow vessels to access the barge ramp at all tide levels, however there are many entrance channels in northern Australian barge ramps where there are tidal restrictions (usually high tide only) to gaining access to the barge ramp.

Market and Investment Uncertainty

State and territory governments are responsible for many barge facilities, but funding is inconsistent across jurisdictions. Emerging industries, such as remote aquaculture, green energy microgrids, and resource exploration, need reliable marine access to grow.

Growth in Defence and Sovereign Maritime Capability

Defence presence across Northern Australia is expanding. Industry opportunities include:

- Maritime infrastructure construction for naval operations.
- Vessel support, maintenance, and logistics.
- Increased demand for secure marine bases, pontoons, berthing solutions, and rapid-deployment infrastructure.

Aquaculture

The north offers optimal conditions for aquaculture expansion, including barramundi, prawns, and seaweed. PMG identifies opportunities in:

- Aquaculture infrastructure installation
- Coastal engineering to support sustainable expansion.
- Research partnerships to develop offshore aquaculture systems.

Support for Critical Minerals Export and Processing

Probably the fastest emerging industries is supply of minerals required for global clean-energy supply chains; such as rare earths and battery minerals, which require efficient marine export channels. Opportunities include:

- Marine terminal construction and upgrades.
- Dredging, navigation aids, and coastal access improvements.
- Renewable energy integration into minerals processing hubs.

Strengthening Partnerships with First Nations Communities

Co-designing development with Traditional Owners will ensure better economic, cultural, and environmental outcomes. Opportunities include:

- Long-term employment pathways in marine and coastal industries.
- Infrastructure delivery that supports community priorities.
- Joint ventures for environmental monitoring and coastal management.

Recommendations to Support a Strong and Competitive Northern Australia

PMG proposes the following actionable recommendations to ensure Northern Australia can successfully prepare for and capitalise on emerging industries:

Invest in Modern, Future-Ready Marine Infrastructure

The federal government should prioritise:

- Strategic upgrades to major northern ports to support large-scale project vessels.
- Expansion of laydown areas, fabrication precincts, and deepwater berths.
- Improved dredging programs supported by streamlined environmental approvals.
- Funding for multi-user marine infrastructure supporting renewable energy, defence, and minerals.

Streamline Regulatory and Permitting Pathways

PMG recommends:

- A harmonised approval framework for coastal and marine infrastructure.
- Clear guidance on offshore renewable energy permitting.
- Expedited assessment pathways for strategic national projects.
- A single-entry “Northern Projects Facilitation Office” to support proponents.

Strengthen Infrastructure Funding Mechanisms for Emerging Industries

The federal government can stimulate investment through:

- Co-funding for enabling infrastructure (ports, roads, coastal assets).
- Incentives for early-stage feasibility and pilot projects.
- Public-private partnerships to reduce capital risk.
- Long-term policy certainty for renewable energy and critical minerals industries.

Enhance First Nations Partnership Frameworks

PMG recommends:

- Funding for Traditional Owner-led coastal planning programs.
- Prioritisation of Indigenous employment and procurement targets.
- Support for joint venture models in marine, coastal, and aquaculture industries.

Role of Pacific Marine Group in Supporting Emerging Industries

PMG stands ready to support Northern Australia's development agenda. Our capabilities include:

- Marine construction, piling, dredging and coastal infrastructure delivery.
- Vessel charter and marine logistics for offshore projects.
- Commercial diving, subsea installation, and maintenance.
- Renewable energy marine support (prototype deployment, cabling, moorings).
- Long-term partnerships with regional and First Nations communities.

Our operational footprint across Northern Australia (and the pacific) positions us as a key enabler of industrial growth and infrastructure delivery.

In conclusion, Northern Australia is entering a transformative period of industrial renewal, driven by global shifts in energy, sustainability, and supply chain security. PMG encourages the Committee to adopt a forward looking approach that prioritises infrastructure investment, regulatory efficiency, workforce development, and genuine partnership with northern communities.

PMG appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and is available to provide further information or appear at public hearings if invited.