



MEDIA RELEASE

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USS Essex skips Townsville

Due to commercial shipping activity, the Port of Townsville is unfortunately unable to accommodate the USS Essex for military exercise, Talisman Sabre 2009, with the only suitable berths required for commercial operations.

The USS Essex had planned to berth in Townsville for eight days from the 29 June to 6 July, with 3,600 US navy personnel to visit the city for shore leave.

International navy personnel on shore leave spend an estimated \$350 per day; the visit would have injected approximately \$10 million into Townsville's economy.

Port of Townsville is experiencing an upsurge in shipping following an extended period of low trade throughput with all suitable berths booked solid by commercial vessels.

The Port has contractual obligations with its major customers which must be upheld and regrettably the USS Essex has decided to go to Cairns where a berth is available for the full duration of the visit.

Townsville Enterprise Chief Executive Officer Trevor Goldstone said he was disappointed but understood the circumstances.

"We appreciate their need to maintain commercial operations and the untenable costs involved with cancelling or delaying the berthing of major customers."

"We also understand the disappointment our tourism industry will feel at this regrettable decision. We had operators banking on the ship's visit – there have been significant cancellations as a result of the decision with a very short lead time," Mr Goldstone said.

Military Tours, the booking agent for shore excursions, had booked 400 hotel rooms in Townsville and Magnetic Island, charter buses, day tours, a golf tournament, visits to local attractions and a significant quantity of tickets to the weekend's Cowboy's home game.

More than half of the crew had pre-booked accommodation or tours with the balance expected to explore the region at their leisure.

Port of Townsville Chief Executive Officer Barry Holden said the Port was disappointed that they could not accommodate the ship for the required duration and that the US navy had decided to go elsewhere.

"The Port has a very strong and ongoing relationship with the Australian and United States Navies and we have worked hard with them for a long time to achieve the best outcome for all parties involved. On this occasion we were just unlucky," Mr Holden said.

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