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Obstinate Chief Minister puts Navy Visits worth more than $12 million at Risk

The Labor Chief Minister has put at risk Navy visits to Darwin, worth more than $12 million per year to the Territory because of her failure to allow for their stopover in the planning of the Waterfront Development, Country Liberal Party Leader Denis Burke said today.

Mr Burke said the prospects of Darwin losing naval visits looms larger than ever given the comments from Defence Minister Robert Hill.

Speaking on Darwin radio today, Defence Minister Senator Robert Hill said that the Territory Labor government is unwilling to move on the issue of the un-loading of fuel as it is incompatible with the type of Waterfront Development the Chief Minister is proposing.

Mr Burke accused the Chief Minister of mis-representing the truth by claiming issues of concern were under control.

“During the Parliamentary sittings in February, we had the Chief Minister stand up and say that all the Defence issues were being worked, that it was all fine and that everything would be worked out. Senator Hill has made it clear this is not the case,” Mr Burke said.

“The Chief Minister has failed to succeed in negotiations with Defence and Senator Hill’s comments today indicate that the Territory Labor government will not discuss any compromises. This attitude directly threatens Navy visits to Darwin which contribute more than $12 million in personal spending plus many millions more in associated expenditure annually to the Territory economy.

“The Chief Minister told parliament on the 16th of February that ‘Many of the issues that Defence might have had concerns about have been finalised …’ which is just plainly untrue. The government aims to solve the problem of bulk fuel unloading by telling the Navy to use the East Arm port but this was ruled out by Senator Hill today saying it was no room there for the ships and it would mean that Darwin would miss out on the economic benefits of the visits.
“What has essentially happened is that the Chief Minister has led Territorians down the garden path. We have heard assurances in Parliament that all the Defence issues were bedded-down, the Waterfront Development would be able to accommodate Navy vessels and that everything was sorted.

“We now know this is not the case and the Chief Minister is directly risking Navy visits to Darwin and more than $12 million it brings in every year.”