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Minns playing defence on harbour

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The navy has fired a broadside at the Minns government's quest to close Sydney's only remaining deepwater port at Glebe Island.

Having fought off attempts to share its Garden Island base with the cruise industry, the navy is clearly not about to let access to Glebe Island sink.

And it did so with a formal Defence Department statement to The Daily Telegraph underlining Glebe Island's importance to naval operations in Sydney.

The statement makes it that much harder – if not impossible – for the NSW government to proceed with plans to close the port for high-rise housing to feed passengers to a planned Metro station in the Bays precinct.

The NSW government had been well on its way to closing Glebe Island until Business Sydney and Sydney's Working Port Coalition raised concerns about unintended, or unconsidered, consequences.

The port's closure would have a huge impact on our city, particularly the regular shipments of cement, gypsum and sugar.

Moving these facilities to Port Kembla or Newcastle would cost hundreds of millions of dollars, drive up costs for home building and general construction, and add thousands of big truck movements to our roads.

To its credit, the government widened its previously inadequate consultation. Consultancy firm Urbis was the first to highlight Glebe Island's importance to national security.

Now the navy has put it beyond doubt, saying it uses Glebe Island and White Bay as additional berths for navy and other defence vessels.

Therein lies Sydney's maritime challenge. As the cruise industry has known for years, Sydney Harbour has an acute shortage of berthing capacity.

The navy has confirmed it is affected just as much and that retention of Glebe Island is essential to defence requirements.

The sooner Premier Chris Minns and Planning Minister Paul Scully resolve the Glebe Island issue the better.

Common sense dictates a hybrid solution where Glebe Island's port industries remain and the government gets some of the high-density housing it wants. It's time for the government to end the uncertainty.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney