newsobserver.com

Published Sun, Jul 25, 2010 02:00 AM
Modified Sat, Jul 24, 2010 11:12 PM

Under water

The N.C. Ports Authority's plan for a $3 billion international shipping terminal near Southport would have been questionable even if the state's economy were swimming in so much cash that Gov. Beverly Perdue had to store some of it in shoeboxes on Blount Street. But now, thankfully, the authority has sunk the plan. Well, almost. Authority officials apparently aren't giving up.

But they could read the tides, and they got quite a bit of blowback - not just about the economic risks in trying to compete with large ports in Virginia and South Carolina but also regarding environmental impacts in the lower Cape Fear River basin, where massive dredging would have been required. The deepwater terminal would have been 15 times larger than the Port of Wilmington, anticipating potential business from huge cargo ships coming into use after a widened Panama Canal opens in a few years.

Supporters envisioned an "economic impact" of 16,000 new jobs. Certainly jobs would have been created, but at what level it's not easy to say, and those benefits would be offset by harm to the Southport area's environment and tourism industry. Thankfully, this project hit choppy waters before any more money was invested.