

# SOUTH ENDEAVOUR TRUST

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July 6 2017

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000  
*By email*

## **Submission regarding legislation to create Special Wildlife Reserve as a new tenure**

**South Endeavour is one of the largest private investors in Biodiversity assets in Queensland. We strongly support this legislation as it would provide us with the security over our investments needed to support further investment in nature based based tourism.**

### **South Endeavour Trust – background**

South Endeavour Trust is a privately funded conservation land trust which owns and manages ten properties in Queensland and five in NSW. In terms of dollars invested, but not hectares owned, South Endeavour is probably the largest private investor in biodiversity assets in Queensland. South Endeavour was founded by senior executives from the finance industry and we regard it like we would any other business except that much of the investment return from it comes by way of unpriced values. Nevertheless, wherever possible we seek a financial return from our investment in the biodiversity assets we have acquired.

### **Why do we strongly support this legislation?**

As private investors in biodiversity assets we want to both maintain and enhance the value of those assets achieve as well as be able to generate an investment return from them to help fund their management costs. In this regard we have regularly investigated the potential for nature based tourism on our properties. This is particularly relevant to Kings Plains and Alkoomie Stations on Cape York near Cooktown which have the highest tourism potential in our portfolio. These two adjoining properties cover 86,000 hectares and make up what is the largest private conservation reserve east of the Great Dividing Range in Australia. We regard these properties as having outstanding potential for mid to high end nature based tourism development. However, having examined this opportunity in depth, we have decided **not** to proceed with what would have to be a very substantial investment in tourism development primarily because current tenure rights in Queensland offer us **no security** over the environmental values that we have acquired.

This is a very real and live issue for us. We provide this example, not to argue any points as regards this specific case, but simply to illustrate to you the importance of security over investment and the reality of threats to that investment that could largely be overcome by the introduction of this new land tenure.

The plans that we have considered for a substantial nature based tourism development on Kings Plains Alkoomie envisage an integrated development of four safari like camps to provide a unique and highly varied nature based experience for visitors. The four camps we have been planning are: Lake Camp, based on the Kings Plains wetlands; Caves Camp, based on the spectacular monsoonal karst system at Melody Rocks on Alkoomie; River Camp, in the Normanby River gorge with its rock art and granite boulderfields and Plateau Camp on the Dickson Range with views to the Great Barrier Reef. The attraction and hence value of the first two of these proposed camps is currently at severe threat due to an application for a limestone quarry which, together with its access road, would totally destroy the attractiveness and value of these two areas. While our investment experience says that such a quarry would be hopelessly uneconomic, and even though we will soon have freehold tenure over the impacted areas, current tenure arrangements leave us effectively powerless to protect our existing investment and **this presents as an insurmountable risk to any further investment**. This would not be the case if the area had been declared a Special Wildlife Reserve. Certainly we would require the security of such a tenure before we would ever reassess the investment case for this tourism development.

Somewhat similarly, the investment value of our proposed River Camp was placed at unacceptable risk by plans that DAF had to permit logging of the riverine forests along the Normanby. Even though the actual value of the timber was minuscule (\$75,000), it took us a good 18 months of discussions with two Ministers and their department's and an enormous amount of grief to actually be able to buy these timber rights and hence remove this risk to our development plans. And while the outcome may have removed the risk, the process significantly undermined our confidence in making the sort of investment we are considering. Again, had the area been designated a Special Wildlife Reserve, this whole issue would not have arisen and we would have had investment certainty.

As a consequence of these experiences, we very strongly support the introduction of the proposed new tenure of Special Wildlife Reserve. While it would place some relatively onerous responsibilities on us, they are ones that, as responsible investors, we are willing to accept. Far more important to us, it would provide the security that any investor like us would require before making further investment in tourism facilities.

**The creation of a Special Wildlife Reserve tenure should be seen as being as much an economic development strategy as a conservation one**

In our experience, many heritage protection related strategies are viewed by many people as being major impediments to development rather than as facilitators of it. For example, World Heritage listing is often viewed in this way. In our experience, having looked at World Heritage sites around the world, it is very clear to us that there is no better brand name in nature and culture based tourism around the world than World Heritage. It tells potential

visitors that they will experience something special and provides a very substantial comparative economic advantage over competing locations without such a designation.

Similarly, while we can understand people looking at this Special Wildlife Reserve legislation and seeing it purely as a conservation initiative, due to the security over investment that it would provide, we regard it just as much as legislation that will act as a facilitator of economic development, something that is definitely needed in the generally relatively remote areas where this form of tenure is likely to be applied. Further, due to its likely limited use it will also imply a measure of exclusive importance to areas so designated that will significantly enhance the potential for appropriate tourism development for such areas. While such development might not be appropriate for all areas designated as Special Wildlife Reserves, in the case of Kings Plains – Alkoomie it would provide the security of our assets that we see as absolutely critical if we are to consider further substantial investment.

I would like to be able to make these points in evidence before the Committee at its hearings on July 12 if that is at all possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Hughes", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Hughes  
Director