

Submission No. 010

16 January 2014

11.1.14

15 January 2014

The Research Director

State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee

By email to – sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

Submission to the Regional Interests Bill 2013 – Sally and John Witherspoon

Dear Ms Pasley

As Sublessees of part of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, and as someone who has perhaps the most detailed knowledge of the land and its management on Cape York, we would like to make a submission to your Committee in support of new legislation which has been proposed and which is designed to fully protect the Reserve from mining.

Our family has a long history of managing property on Cape York since early last century and John grew up and lived on Meripah, near Coen from 1965 until 1989. We took over the lease of the "Bertiehaugh" property in 2004 and were astounded by the natural values of the property. Because of these exceptional values we were happy to sell to Australia Zoo in about December 2007, although we retained part of the land under a sublease arrangement. We were so worried about the management (particularly fire management) of the area that we would not have sold Bertiehaugh if we were not able to be involved in same.

With our sons, Iain and David, we have occupied the Bertiehaugh property and lived in the homestead from 2004 until early 2009. Since that time the homestead has been occupied by managers under our personal supervision.

We work closely with Australia Zoo in the control of fire, weeds and feral animals, and believe this has been highly beneficial to the sustainable land, animal, and environmental management of the Reserve.

The Bertiehaugh property, with frontages to both the Wenlock and Ducie rivers has always been recognized on the Cape as having exceptional environmental values. This deserved reputation within the region as an iconic environmental area has grown exponentially since the establishment of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. The ensuing body of scientific work carried out under the auspices of Australia Zoo adds to this reputation daily.

Our submissions to the Regional Interests Bill are shown below. We will also be making submissions to the Cape York Regional Plan (CYRP) prior to 25 March, but have identified some fundamental issues here because of the interdependencies involved and the reliance on the CYRP to carry forward the objectives of the Bill.

1. We believe that the importance of the this unique property within the Cape York region and the State of Queensland warrants the direct nomination of the SIWR in the Bill and the Cape York Regional Plan.



2. Based on our intimate knowledge of the property, we believe that any mining on the Reserve will risk irreversible and widespread impacts on the natural values of the property and the Wenlock River, and should not be allowed. We have seen the impact of bauxite mining in, and around Weipa and it is not a pretty sight. Once the bauxite "water sponge" layer has gone, the country and the flora and fauna can never be the same.
3. We acknowledge that the statements relating to Strategic Environmental Areas in the CYPR support our submission 2 above, but Table 1 of the CYPR, which proposes open cut and strip mining as an "unacceptable use", is also noted as being an "indicative guide only". Table 1 needs to be amended to provide certainty that mining in SIWR, as well as other areas of unique environmental value on the Cape, will be prohibited. We need this certainty for future generations to enjoy and value such areas.
4. We have concerns about Clause 25 of the Bill whereby "small scale mining activity" within the meaning of the Environment Protection Act, is an "exempt resource activity". We need to know that "other" mining (which is listed as "compatible subject to regional criteria" in Table 1 of the CYPR, and therefore requiring risk assessment) cannot be circumvented under clause 25 of the Bill. Our concern is that there are parts of SIWR where even "small scale mining activity" would risk irreversible impacts on the natural values. We note that a Uranium EPM covers part of the SIWR. Could a small scale uranium mine be an "exempt resource activity"?
5. The research facilities provided by Australia Zoo are another stand out feature and unique identifier. The body of research work carried out at these facilities since 2007 is quite significant in both size and importance and we feel these research facilities are important enough to warrant direct reference in the Bill and the CYPR.

Subject to the matters raised we endorse the legislative initiative by the Newman government to protect the SIWR from mining and thus safeguard this ecologically significant part of Queensland for future generations.



Sally and John Witherspoon.