

Dr Ross Dwyer  
Post-doctoral research fellow  
School of Biological Sciences

16<sup>th</sup> January 2014

The Research Director  
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE, QLD 4000

Submission No. 014  
17 January 2014  
11.1.14

## Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

I congratulate the Newman Government for its initiative in proposing **new legislation which will declare the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and the Wenlock River on Cape York as Queensland's first ever "Strategic Environment Area", and by so doing protecting these areas from open-cut and strip mining in perpetuity.**

There is already a substantial body of scientific evidence which identifies the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and the Wenlock River as containing some of the highest natural values in Australia.

My field of scientific study is animal ecology, with my qualifications being a Doctorate in Philosophy in Ecology, a Master of Research in Environmental Science and a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Zoology.

For my post-doctoral research, I have been studying the movements and space usage of estuarine crocodiles within the Port Musgrave River Catchment. Our aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of crocodile behavior and understand their ecological role as top predators within northern Australian river systems. This information will be used directly to inform crocodile management plans, which help mitigate risk and develop and coordinate strategies that promote human/crocodile coexistence.

Our fieldwork takes place on the Wenlock River, at the southern border of The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, which is a strong-hold for crocodiles in Queensland. Whilst based in the Reserve, we conduct onsite training in the surveying and trapping of crocodiles for Indigenous Rangers from rural communities based in and around Weipa and Mapoon.

Having the threat of mining hanging over the reserve, it has always been difficult for me to dispel uncertainty about the protection and preservation of this iconic environmental asset. The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve is home to not only crocodiles, but also species listed as critically endangered (freshwater sawfish), endangered (spear-tooth shark) or near-threatened (palm cockatoo) by the IUCN. These iconic species (and many more) depend on the diversity of habitats within the Reserve. I feared that major land-use changes (such as those proposed by the Pisolite Hills Cape York bauxite project) would result in the loss of critical habitats and the great diversity of species which depend on them.

I wish to endorse the announcement by the government **that any activities that risk irreversible, or widespread impacts to the ecological integrity of the natural values of the Wenlock strategic environmental area as identified in the Draft Cape York Regional Plan, will not be allowed.**

Legislation leading to this outcome will be seen as safeguarding this ecologically significant part of Queensland for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross G. Dwyer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Dr Ross Dwyer  
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24<sup>th</sup> February 2014

The Research Director  
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE, QLD 4000

### **Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you with regards to my letter on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014 concerning **new legislation which will declare the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and the Wenlock River on Cape York as Queensland's first ever "Strategic Environment Area"**.

In my letter I firstly congratulate the Newman Government for proposing legislation which increases protection for an area of *extraordinary ecological significance*.

While I am aware the comment period has now passed, I would like to add clarification to a point I raised in the sixth paragraph of my letter. In this paragraph I stated "*The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve is home to not only crocodiles, but also species listed as critically endangered (freshwater sawfish), endangered (spear-tooth shark) or near-threatened (palm cockatoo) by the IUCN. These iconic species (and many more) depend on the diversity of habitats within the Reserve.*"

I would like to correct detail within this paragraph to list the palm cockatoo as 'near-threatened' at the **state-level** (Queensland) and not the IUCN as previously stated. This listing was granted as species' population is likely to be small<sup>1</sup> (i.e. restricted to a few areas within the Cape York Peninsula) and is currently threatened by changed fire ecology<sup>2</sup> and strip mining for Bauxite<sup>3</sup>.

I would also like to clarify this sentence so that it is evident that that freshwater sawfish and spear-tooth shark occur specifically within the Wenlock River, which lies at the southern border of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. During the wet season, this river expands to immerse many billabongs, anabranches and streams which lie further within the Reserve, making these water features functionally part of the Wenlock system. We know this through direct observations, and through tracking data which shows many estuarine crocodiles move from the river to occupy these areas between the months of January and April.

I hope it is not too late to make these amendments to my previous submission. Again I wish to endorse the announcement by the government **that any activities that risk irreversible, or widespread impacts to the ecological integrity of the natural values of the Wenlock strategic environmental area as identified in the Draft Cape York Regional Plan, will not be allowed.**

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<sup>1</sup> GARNETT, S. & CROWLEY, G. 2000. Action plan for Australian birds 2000. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service; Birds Australia Environment Australia.

<sup>2</sup> RUSSELL-SMITH, J., STANTON, P. J., WHITEHEAD, P. J. & EDWARDS, A. 2004. Rainforest invasion of eucalypt-dominated woodland savanna, iron range, north-eastern Australia: I. Successional processes. *Journal of Biogeography*, 31, 1293-1303.

<sup>3</sup> GOULD, S. 2010. Does post-mining rehabilitation on the Weipa bauxite plateau restore bird habitat values? Ph.D, The Australian National University

Legislation leading to this outcome will be seen as safeguarding this ecologically significant part of Queensland for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

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