

The Research Director
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
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Regional Planning Interests Bill 2013

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 protect these areas from open cut and strip mining in perpetuity.**

My field of scientific study is biodiversity—discovering and describing diversity, working out how it forms and adapts, and the management of biodiversity into the future. A particular focus of my studies is Queensland's reptiles and frogs. My qualifications are a BSc with 1st Class Honours (UQ), followed by a PhD (UQ). Subsequently I have completed two research fellowships on Queensland biodiversity and currently hold a lectureship position at James Cook University (Townsville).

In November 2008 I was part of a specialist team that completed a vertebrate biodiversity survey at the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, with a particular focus on reptiles and frogs. Our survey and other surveys conducted on the Reserve have revealed that the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve contains very high vertebrate biodiversity, including a number of rare and threatened species. This diversity spans three very important, inter-dependent habitats: (1) the riparian corridor along the Wenlock River, (2) the freshwater springs, and (3) the open forest communities. A lot of focus has been placed on the first two of these, for very good reason, they contain unique diversity and threatened species. However, I'd also like to highlight the importance and rarity of diverse, healthy open forest communities in north Queensland and tropical Australia more generally. Rarely have I seen such a healthy open forest wildlife community. Species that have become rare elsewhere in the region are thriving on the Reserve. This is in part due to the ecology of the region and in part testament to current land management practices.

The uncertainty over the protection and preservation of this area due to mining activities needs to be removed. The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve is a very important environmental area in Queensland and warrants the highest level of protection.

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.


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