

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

Addressed to: sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

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 investigating how new species evolve – that is, how biodiversity arises in the first place. I work on north Queensland's frog and fly species. My qualifications are a BSc(Hons), 1st Class, from the University of Queensland, followed by a PhD at the University of Queensland. Currently I hold a prestigious Australian Research Council (ARC) 'Discovery' Early Career Researcher Fellowship, and am a lecturer at James Cook University in Townsville. I previously held a prestigious ARC Post-doctoral Research Fellowship, taken at the Australian National University. I was awarded a Queensland 'Young Tall Poppy' Science Award in 2012 in recognition of my research into how biodiversity arises. I have extensive field work experience carrying out research and surveys across north Queensland and therefore have an good knowledge of the diversity of habitats, the organism's in them, and the environmental health of these communities.

In November 2008 I carried out a vertebrate biodiversity survey at the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve as part of specialist team. Our survey had a particular focus on reptiles and frogs, and revealed that the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve contains very high vertebrate biodiversity, including a number of rare and threatened species. Our surveys covered three very important, inter-dependent habitats: the riparian corridor along the Wenlock River, the freshwater springs, and the open forest communities. All three habitats contained highly diverse and distinct communities of vertebrates. Importantly, all three of these stood out as the most environmentally-healthy examples of these communities that I have ever visited in north Queensland. This is due to the long term and careful environmental management of the properties now known as the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve.

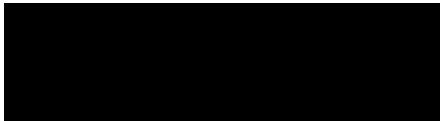
Any mining activity in this area would destroy the vast majority of the biodiversity in each of these three communities — especially the unique, the rare, and the threatened biodiversity. This is because this unique, the rare, and the threatened biodiversity is dependent on the exact set of environmental processes that are present in these environments, and have been carefully conserved at the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. Strip-mining irreversibly changes these physical characteristics, such as soil structure and bacterial community, and water flow through and across the landscape. It has been repeatedly shown in north Queensland that remediation following strip mining cannot restore these physical characteristics or the communities that once occurred on them.

Therefore, 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.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Dr Megan Higgle.

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