

16 January 2014

The Research Director
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane 4000
sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

Submission to the Regional Interests Bill 2013 on behalf of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Steering Committee, by Ken Hicks (Chair).

Dear Ms Pasley

I write this submission in my capacity as Chair of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee was formed in 2007 in compliance with the requirements of the Agreement between Australia Zoo and the Commonwealth of Australia to "*establish a Private Protected Area which will be part of the **National Reserve System***".

The Steering Committee is charged with the management of the Reserve, the major part of which (including the area threatened by mining) is classified under **IUCN Category; Ia Strict Nature Reserve: Protected Area managed only for science.**

The 'Objectives of Management' in the Agreement include:

- *To preserve habitats, ecosystems and species in as undisturbed state as possible.*
- *To maintain established ecological processes.*
- *To minimise disturbance by careful planning and execution of research and other approved activity.....**any activity which induces permanent change in the intrinsic character of the natural system is unacceptable.***

Silverback Properties Pty Ltd (the land holding entity for Australia Zoo) has a Conservation Agreement with the Queensland Government to Establish the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve **Nature Refuge** dated 17 February 2012. This binding Agreement specifies a number of "Significant Natural Resources of the Land" which include "*numerous seepage springs associated with, and fed by, the perched water table of the bauxite plateau*".

The Agreement is specific in providing the following information as to the significance of the springs: "Springs and their associated ecosystems, flora and fauna are highly susceptible to disturbance either through human-induced changes in hydrology or over extraction of water from them."

The Steering Committee is therefore charged with ensuring that disturbances to the springs do not occur. The removal of the threat of mining will be the best way to protect this critically fragile area.

The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Nature Refuge was gazetted on 14 September 2012. The Protected Area Plan AP18994 includes the above mentioned springs within the Nature Refuge area.

The Springs and the Wenlock River are also currently protected under the **Wild Rivers** legislation.

The Steering Committee acts as the manager for the responsibilities placed on Australia Zoo by the above agreements and legislation. The Committee is united in its assessment that any mining within the SIWR would be **highly incompatible** with the environmental safeguards set out in the agreements we have signed with both the Commonwealth and the Queensland Governments.

We are therefore delighted and relieved to learn that the Newman Government has recognised the SIWR as Queensland's first ever "strategic environmental area", and that pending legislation will protect the Reserve in perpetuity from open cut and strip mining and other activities that risk widespread impacts to the ecological integrity.

The Steering Committee meets regularly and its members proactively support and manage the Reserve 365 days a year. If the Queensland Government is looking for a "flagship" for the management of reserves, I would suggest that the SIWR would be a worthy example. We are indebted here to the total commitment of Australia Zoo and the Irwin Family.

All members of the Committee who are not public servants have made individual submissions to the Bill. As a matter of protocol I have not sought submissions from our public servant members. Member submissions I am aware of include:

- Mrs Terri Irwin A.M – with much of the supporting information contributed by Senior Ranger Barry Lyon. Professor Craig Franklin – Director of Research SIWR.
- Sally and John Witherspoon – Sub-lessees of part of the property, and partners in the management of all of SIWR.
- Suzelie Connelly – CPR Group – Coordinator of the SIWR Management Plan.
- McColm Matsinger Lawyers – Legal advisors to SIWR.

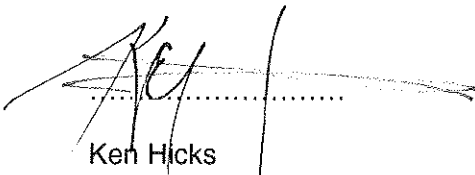
All of the above submissions support the objectives of the proposed legislation and offer constructive comment as to improvements for consideration. It is not my intention to re-state the detail, or the suggested recourse, provided within the above submissions, but it may be helpful to list a summary of matters about which we seek further resolution:

1. Nomination of the SIWR – due recognition – certainty for SIWR and for miners.
2. Recognition of the research facilities.
3. Recognition of the Wenlock River as the most important crocodile habitat and breeding area in Queensland.

4. Recognition that the natural health of the Coolibah springs area is fundamental to the continued protection of the Wenlock River.
5. Direction within the Bill or the Regulations to ensure certainty is carried through to the Cape York Regional Plan about mining being an unacceptable use in the SIWR and other strategic environmental areas containing significant natural attributes.
6. Ensure that the Wild Rivers protection is kept in place until the new legislation is fully enacted.
7. Provision for the Chief Executive to refuse, or not allow a renegade application to be "properly made" (for example an application for an "unacceptable use" in the SIWR).
8. Removal of any opportunity of "small scale mining activity" being allowed in strategic environmental areas where there is risk of irreversible environmental impact.
9. Clarification of status of a Nature Refuge within an area protected by the new legislation.
10. Provision for challenge to future alterations to Regional Plan maps, and allow the Chief Executive to over-ride local government recommendations.
11. Lessees of pastoral leases to be included in the definition of Land Owner.
12. Ensure that a Land Owner must receive notification prior to any application on his land being processed.

In conclusion, the SIWR Steering Committee welcomes the initiatives taken by the Newman Government to protect the Reserve from mining which, if allowed, would threaten the very reason for our being there and destroy the opportunity to continue our research and education programs for the benefit of all Queenslanders for future generations.

We also commend the suggestions we have made as a way to assist the informed passage of the legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Hicks', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right. Below the signature is a dotted line.

Ken Hicks
Chair, Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Steering Committee