

25 February 2014

Supplementary submission No. 099

25 February 2014

11.1.14

The Research Director
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
George St
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Dear Committee Members,

ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION TO THE REGIONAL PLANNING INTERESTS BILL 2013 COMMITTEE INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a further submission to the Committee in relation to this Bill and for allowing my representative, Mr Barry Lyon, to represent me at your formal hearing earlier this month.

In my original submission I documented the environmental, social and economic qualities and benefits of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Nature Refuge and spoke about the unique opportunity we have to protect this pristine area in perpetuity.

The Bill as it stands is committed to protecting the Strategic Environmental Areas in Queensland, of which the SIWR is one, and I support that principle.

After listening to the replay of the Hearing and reading the transcripts, I feel it is very important that I both reiterate the key points about protecting the Reserve as well as rebutting the misleading statements put forward particularly by Cape Alumina.

As I have previously stated, I am not anti-mining, and indeed have developed a relationship with Rio Tinto which includes providing crocodile awareness training to their staff.

I was exceedingly disappointed with the contribution by Cape Alumina's Managing Director, Mr Graeme Sherlock. The large number of inaccuracies, distortions and complete untruths were astonishing. There were claims such as the SIWR having only the support of only one TO, the claim that the Nature Refuge explicitly excluded the CA Mining Lease Application and the completely inaccurate allegation that feral pigs cause more damage to the Springs than mining ever would.

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25.02.2014

I have included a table at the end of this document which details a variety of other spurious claims by Cape Alumina as against the actual reality.

That aside, I am again reminded that the most obvious solution to ensure the highest protection is afforded to the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Nature Refuge is to have it listed separately in Clause 11 of the Bill.

I do not resilie from the dream that Steve and I had to protect natural areas of Queensland that have high conservation values – protect them for everyone.

I congratulate Premier Newman and Deputy Premier Seeney on their obvious desire to facilitate this protection – and I ask that the Committee fulfils that desire by making the amendment to Clause 11 at the time the Bill is debated in the House, or puts in place an alternative which will have the same legislative strength to achieve the objective of protecting the Reserve from mining in perpetuity.

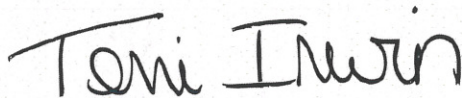
Steve was an advocate for every single person on this planet to take responsibility for the environment. He inspired me, he inspired Bindi and Robert and I know he has inspired this government as well.

I again implore the Committee to look closely at the intent of the legislation and make the changes necessary to ensure that Steve's Place – the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve Nature Refuge - is protected forever.

I thank the Committee for displaying such a comprehensive commitment to exploring all avenues of this Bill and allowing us to make further comment. Your commitment to good governance in Queensland is to be commended.

I look forward to seeing your final recommendations.

Yours faithfully,



Terri Irwin AM
Australia Zoo

Erroneous Claims made by Cape Alumina during formal Hearing on 12 February 2014

	CLAIM	COMMENT	FACT
1	Page 28 – The Wenlock River is not part of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve.	This claim deliberately ignores the critical association between the Wenlock river and the Reserve and is therefore misleading.	<p>The perennial Wenlock River and its eastern tributary (Schramm Creek) form the southern boundary of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve (SIWR) running along a distance of approximately 65 kilometres. It is normal that major rivers within their banks are not part of the adjoining land title, nevertheless there is a dynamic interface between the river and the land. The high northern bank of the Wenlock River is within the Reserve</p> <p>Nimrod Creek, the eight perennial bauxite springs and other associated swamps, billabongs and ephemeral creeks link with - and are critical parts of the Wenlock River system. These features are fully contained within the Reserve.</p> <p>The Wenlock River and its tributaries feature significant riparian rainforests and open forests growing along their banks. (The Wenlock Rainforest is classified as Type 11, Stanton and Fell), which are supported by the associated moist substrate. These vary in width from approximately 10 to over 300 metres.</p> <p>These corridors have been found to be of major conservation significance, as identified in the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study (CYPLUS) – ‘Areas of Conservation Significance on Cape York Peninsula’, (which is listed on the Australian Government Department of Environment website). The Wenlock River – almost 300 kilometres long, supports a rainforest corridor that connects the rainforests of the east coast of Cape York with those along the Gulf of Carpentaria coastline (Abrahams et al).</p> <p>This rainforest features the emergent tree species <i>Pterocarpus</i> sp which occurs only in the gallery rainforests of the Wenlock and Archer Rivers (Fell, 2009), and thus is a Cape York endemic species of very limited range.</p> <p>A significant range of rainforest faunal species utilises the Wenlock Catchment riparian forests, which grade into drier adjacent rainforest types and sclerophyll woodlands across the broader landscape. These species are able to persist/recolonise drier parts of the western Peninsula because of the existence of such corridors (Valentine et al 2013).</p> <p>The fauna assemblage includes a significant range of Cape York endemic, rare and threatened, migratory and other species of conservation significance, including the nationally endangered Northern Quoll, Queensland endangered Red Goshawk, Queensland vulnerable Spotted Cuscus and Rufous Owl, the EPBC listed Palm Cockatoo and Imperial Torresian Turtle Dove, the Yellow billed Kingfisher, Magnificent Rifle Bird, Trumpet Manucode and Cape York</p>

	CLAIM	COMMENT	FACT
			<p>prehensile tailed Gecko.</p> <p>The Palm Cockatoo is an excellent example of a species of conservation importance that requires gallery and spring rainforests, and Eucalypt woodlands for both food and nesting purposes.</p> <p>All these examples provide strong and ample evidence of the significant ecological values and functions of the Wenlock River and the two way connections that link the broader landscape with the river.</p>
2	In response to a few arguments presented by other submissions - "which we believe are misleading and not based on factual or scientific evidence".	This claim is extraordinary in that it is clearly directed at submissions by Australia Zoo and its team of scientists. The claim, especially in the absence of any supporting evidence, does Cape Alumina no credit and casts doubt over the authenticity of all of its claims.	The extent and details of research activities have been documented in submission no 3 (Connelly project Resources Group – the Master Plan), No 31 (Professor C.E. Franklin, University of Queensland, and no 63 (Terri Irwin A.M, Australia Zoo) Further scientific submissions were made which demonstrate the scale and importance of our research – nos 14,16,17,23,25,27 and 66.
3	Photographs were tabled (page 28) with the statement that from The Wenlock River "there is only 100 to 200 metres of greenbelt."	It would appear that the only reason for providing the photos was to discredit the environmental values of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve.	<p>The two pages of photographs (obviously from their archives) were presented on plans dated May 2007 - which is just after we conducted our first environmental investigations and just before we took over management of the Reserve.</p> <p>My team and I have nevertheless made a thorough examination of the photos and the comments associated with these photos. We have found from almost seven years of ground-truthing that we disagree with much of the content. It should be noted by the Committee that variation in the width of the rainforest corridor is from just a few metres to over 300 metres depending on the location and the underlying soil type.</p> <p>We find that the photographs (and captions) as tabled are of limited value in the context of this Inquiry. We would however relish the opportunity to provide a critical analysis of the captioned photos plus provide better information should this be of assistance for detailed mapping purposes.</p> <p>Our alarming concern from evidence provided by the MD of Cape Alumina is that he is so disparaging about the western cape environment that he doesn't recognise the importance that areas outside of the so-called "green belt" play in the various eco-systems. He has intimated that the only environment worth preserving is the one that has a scenic</p>

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			amenity. He therefore intimates that any non-lush environment that has a functional role to play in maintaining the health of local flora and fauna is of no environmental value.
4	<p>Page 28 – “the 8 springs are not the lifeline of the Wenlock.....the springs will not be mined”.</p> <p>“There are over 100 reported springs in Cape York with a similar nature to ones found in the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve”.</p> <p>Page 28 – “Infiltration studies by UQ ... confirmed no change to the water quality that would be delivered to the springs.”</p>	<p>Our scientific investigations (some of which are detailed in the right column) lead us to diametrically differ with their claims.</p> <p>In the case of conflicting science, the precautionary principle should apply, and the springs not be disturbed.</p>	<p>This brief of values and functions confirms the role the bauxite springs have in contributing to the nature and functioning of the Wenlock River.</p> <p>The intrinsic nature and natural function of any river is the result of the complex of natural inputs and connections across its catchment.</p> <p>The 300 kilometre long, perennial Wenlock River is fed by ephemeral and perennial springs and streams, the volume of inflow of which varies annually, driven by seasonal factors.</p> <p>It should be noted that each dry season, the majority of rivers on Cape York dry back to distinct waterholes separated by sand and/or rock stretches.</p> <p>The Wenlock is one of a small suite of perennial watercourses within the Cape York Bioregion.</p> <p>The perennial Jardine, Olive, Dulhunty, and Jackson Rivers; and Crystal and Harmer Creeks are fed by sandstone springs.</p> <p>However the Wenlock is distinctive in being fed by both sandstone and bauxite springs.</p> <p>The eight previously unknown (in scientific terms) bauxite springs on the SIWR, and those on the neighbouring part of the bauxite plateau (visited in the company of Traditional Owners) have been found to be major components of the natural attributes and functions of the Wenlock River system and its catchment, and are of outstanding ecological importance (Lyon et al, Fell):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bauxite springs provide crucial freshwater flow across an otherwise dry landscape and contribute inflow into the perennial Wenlock. This water supply is critical for a range of dependant terrestrial and aquatic fauna, including many bird, fish, frog, and some macropod species. Such fauna also utilises the spring/riparian forests as a refuge during the hot, dry conditions of the late dry season. • They provide crucial aquatic and terrestrial ecological connections between the springs and the Wenlock River, and contribute in a major way to the system’s biodiversity. • They provide significant habitat for a wide range of species of conservation significance, some of which are spring dependant, others which require a combination of rainforest, open forest, woodland habitats for feeding

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		<p>and/or nesting purposes.</p> <p>The latter includes the nationally endangered Northern Quoll, Queensland endangered Red Goshawk, Queensland vulnerable Spotted Cuscus and Rufous Owl, the EPBC listed Palm Cockatoo and Imperial Torresian Turtle Dove. The Northern Quoll, Palm Cockatoo, and Red Goshawk are all species dependent upon the combination of spring forests, and adjacent open woodlands on the bauxite plateau and colluvial plains.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive studies undertaken by Dr M Le Blanc have confirmed the hydrological connection between the bauxite plateau and their associated springs and thus a connection with, and contribution to the Wenlock River. These studies have confirmed the role of the bauxite plateau as the recharge area for the aquifer that gives life to the bauxite springs. • Significantly, the Bauxite Springs have been found to meet all six criteria used to identify wetlands of importance in Queensland (Blackman et al) which is unusual for freshwater wetlands, (Lyon et al, Fell). • In recognition of their unique ecological attributes, the bauxite springs have been listed by Queensland Government botanists as a new, distinctive spring type; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Regional Ecosystem Type 3.10.1.d: Springs and their vegetation communities (evergreen mesophyll/notophyll rainforests) associated with the margins of tertiary remnant plateaus. VMG: Of Concern.</i> <p>The need for adequate aquifer recharge is further highlighted:</p> <p><i>“The bauxite springs are on the brink of survival in that even small changes in the watertable may facilitate changes in the structure, function and composition of the ecosystem. The pristine condition of the springs is attributable to the current integrity of hydro-ecological processes across the region (Earth Tech 2005), where recharge areas remain in a natural state as a function of innate remoteness,” DG Fell 2009.</i></p>