




Speech By
Hon. Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve

 **Hon. AC POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection) (2.14 pm): There are a few people in life who have the ability to make an entire country stop in its tracks. Even fewer individuals have the ability to deliver real and lasting change. Steve Irwin was one of those people. He was larger than life and had a connection with people that others can only dream of. He was a passionate advocate for environmental conservation both here in Australia and around the world. Steve Irwin's crusades were not political; they were personal and they were passionate such was his belief in the need for all Australians to protect our natural environment and our wildlife.

In paying tribute to Steve Irwin after his untimely death in 2006, the then Prime Minister John Howard said, 'He brought to Australians and the world an understanding of nature. He taught our children, in particular, to love and respect all creatures great and small.' It was in that spirit that the Howard government provided funding from the National Reserve System to secure land with exceptional natural heritage values in his honour. This was the genesis for what is now known as the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve in Cape York.

Dedicated in July 2007, the 135,000-hectare Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve protects internationally significant ecosystems across the Wenlock and Ducie River catchments. It is a special place. In September last year, further protection was added by the Newman government when the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve was designated a nature refuge. Today I am proud to announce that through a bill that the Deputy Premier will introduce later today the Newman government will ensure that Steve Irwin's legacy lives on and that this magnificent reserve is protected in its entirety.

The reserve boasts a mosaic of 35 different ecosystem types—vast areas of tropical savannah woodland, nationally significant rainforest and a noteworthy diversity of riverine and wetland types, supporting species not recorded anywhere else in Australia. The reserve is home to 165 bird, 26 reptile, 21 amphibian, 20 mammal and 43 fish species and threatened animals such as the spotted cuscus, the red goshawk, the palm cockatoo, the jabiru and the marbled frogmouth. Of course, there is then the estuarine crocodile, which has ultimately become synonymous with Steve and his family.

I have had the privilege of visiting this special part of the world, and I can assure all members of this House that its declaration as a strategic environmental area is well and truly fitting. The Newman government has consistently said that we believe in the need to balance economic growth with environmental protection on Cape York. Despite what those opposite will have you believe, that does not mean we are winding back environmental protections or taking an open slather approach. It means we are working to deliver a balance. We are making sensible, practical decisions to protect what needs protection, whilst encouraging sustainable economic development to occur. They are not mutually exclusive.

Labor could never get this balance right. They reached too far into some places, stifling the hopes and dreams of too many Indigenous communities, whilst failing to provide the full legal

protection for places like the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve. This is exactly what happens when you look to extreme green groups for policy and when you need Greens preferences to stay in power. Yet, despite all the talk and the green grandstanding, Labor failed to protect this reserve. Andrew McNamara would not do it, Vicky Darling could not do it and Kate Jones did not do it. But the Newman government will do it and we will do it properly. There will be no mining on Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve—not now, not ever, not some, not any. The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve will be set aside as a nationally important reserve in perpetuity and a tribute to the late Steve Irwin. This additional protection offered by the Newman government will ensure that the reserve will continue to play an important part in the protection of exceptional biodiversity in Queensland for years to come.

A legacy is something we all hope to leave when we die, but perhaps it is what lives on that is the most important thing of all. With today's announcement, the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve will live on for future generations, further demonstrating that this is truly a great state with great opportunity.