



Premier of Queensland

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Thank you for your letter of 27 February 2009 outlining Wilderness Society Conservation Policies for the 2009 Queensland Election. This letter builds on the earlier interim response you received on 7 March 2009 from the Deputy Premier.

In relation to the specific issues you have raised, I can advise as follows:

**Policy Area 1: Protecting Cape York Peninsula's Heritage**

**1.1 Implementation of existing policies: Land**

As you know, the Queensland Government has maintained a very strong commitment to protecting the significant conservation and cultural values of Cape York Peninsula (CYP) dating back to the development of the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy (CYPLUS) under the Goss administration; the funding of the 'Statement of Natural Heritage Significance of Cape York Peninsula' and the signing on to the CYP Heads of Agreement in 2001 under Premier Beattie.

Since then, the Government has established the Cape York Tenure Resolution Implementation Process (CYTRIG) and most recently, enacted the *Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007* (CYPHA) which was proclaimed by the Queensland Parliament on 2 November 2007.

CYTRIG was established in 2004 to support the delivery of the Queensland Government's election policy 'Protecting Queensland's Natural Heritage: Cape York's Outstanding Values' with the original focus being to resolve tenure issues of 20 parcels of state-owned land. Since the passage of the CYPHA in November 2007 the intentions of the Queensland Government's voluntary land acquisition program have been clarified as being for the dual purposes of the protection of conservation values, including new protected areas, and the continued return of homelands to traditional owners to enable them to develop an economic future.

Since 1994, the Queensland Government has spent \$21,357,000 purchasing approximately 1,297,500 hectares of land in CYP. Properties purchased include: Starcke, Silver Plains, Kalpowar, Boynton, Melsonby, Archer Point, Lilyvale, Upper Bridge Creek, Mount Croll, Orchid Creek, St Georges Peak, Kalinga and Mount Jack.

Under CYTRIG some 580,072 hectares of land has now been transferred back to Aboriginal freehold ownership. Additionally, Traditional Owners have agreed to an area of approximately 87,347 hectares being included as Nature Refuges and some 533,075 hectares of new national parks have been created.



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New properties, additional to the original 20 parcels, have been purchased in the past 12 months and more purchases are possible where opportunities can be realised to add to the already significant conservation estate in Cape York Peninsula.

Over this same period the Commonwealth committed \$3,393,333 which included a \$3,250,000 contribution to Starcke and Silver Plains in 1994. Since then, however, the only Commonwealth contribution has been \$143,000 for Melsonby (Bridge Creek) in 2002. This is despite a \$40 million commitment from the Howard Commonwealth Government in 1996 to support the proposed Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan.

Following the election of the Rudd Labor Government in December 2007, which explicitly committed to support conservation and Indigenous land management outcomes in CYP, the Queensland Government is anticipating a much closer partnership between our two governments to achieve our mutual aims for this iconic and internationally significant region.

The Commonwealth Government's commitment to the funding opportunities explicitly enunciated in their \$2.25 billion Caring For Our Country Business Plan, provide a strong foundation for the coordinated delivery of significant conservation and cultural outcomes over the next 3-5 years.

#### **Future Directions**

The current focus for acquisitions is in central-western Cape York where a large number of clans are yet to benefit from the CYTRIG process and where there is currently limited protected area representation.

There are essentially two key sub-regional aggregations of properties, the first comprising Strathmay, Harkness, Balurga and the second encompassing the properties of Dixie, Wulpan, Crosby and Killarney. These properties sit mostly west of the Great Dividing Range in the upper sections of the Alice, Coleman and Edward Rivers which all drain westward into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Killarney is on the headwaters of the Morehead River which flows into Princess Charlotte Bay on the east coast.

If able to be acquired, these areas could deliver a significant land purchase of up to 900 000ha of which at least 50% could become national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) with some additional areas included as nature refuges over Aboriginal land, and the balance being for return of homelands to Aboriginal people for their social and economic development.

The Queensland Government is currently actively seeking funding under the Commonwealth's 2008-09 National Reserve System allocation for assistance to purchase one or more of three properties totaling 515 000ha (Dixie, Wulpan and Crosby) in the second group referred to above.

Given our considerable investment to date in land acquisition, and the significant conservation and land justice gains achieved as a result of the successful CYTRIG process, the Queensland Government will be seeking a much stronger commitment from the Commonwealth Government in the future to contribute toward a financial assistance package for ongoing land acquisition in Cape York Peninsula.

## **1.2 Implementation of existing policies: Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act**

### **Committees**

In September 2008 the Government announced the establishment of the Cape York Peninsula Regional Advisory Committee (CYPRAC) and the Cape York Peninsula Region Scientific and Cultural Advisory Committee (CYP SCAC) as required under the CYPHA.

The Committees have each begun to undertake a work program based on their particular areas of responsibility under the CYPHA. A quarterly meeting schedule has been agreed for the CYPRAC with the SCAC meeting more regularly on an as needs basis.

### **Delivery Issues**

The Cape York Peninsula Tenure Task Force is a small multi-agency team which is responsible for coordinating and implementing the Government's CYTRIG agenda. The Task Force is responsible for identifying properties, supporting and coordinating the negotiations and preparing regulatory and contractual arrangements for the implementation of the agreed outcomes.

In addition to the Traditional Owner groups and their representatives, local government, lessees, and conservation groups also have input into the negotiation process.

Following enactment of the CYPHA a Cape York Peninsula Heritage Committees Secretariat has also been established and located within the Department of Natural Resources and Water.

Similarly, the need for streamlined coordination processes between Queensland and the Commonwealth has been recognised by both governments with discussions under way at both a political and departmental level to agree the best way forward. We recognise there is a range of views existing among Cape York Stakeholders regarding Indigenous Protected Areas. Under these circumstances Government recognises both the existence of these lands and the ongoing debate regarding them.

## **1.3 Implementation of existing policies: Indigenous rangers; land and sea centres and management**

### **Wild River Rangers**

We re-affirm our commitment to 100 wild river rangers. The Department of Natural Resources and Water have contracted the employment of 20 Wild River Rangers to work with communities and traditional owners and landholders to protect and promote the wild river systems in the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York.

The program not only provides protection for the world-class natural values of the area but also creates much-needed employment in remote Indigenous communities. These locally employed rangers work with elders to preserve wetlands and ecosystems of high biodiversity or cultural significance.

The skills these rangers develop will be passed on to the next generation and will ensure Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria's unique ecologies are better managed and preserved. The Wild River rangers have been employed locally and have close links with the Traditional Owners of the country they will be caring for.

The current 20 Rangers are located in the following Indigenous communities:

- Pormpuraaw Land and Sea Centre (Coleman and Holroyd rivers) - four rangers
- Mapoon (lower Wenlock and Ducle rivers) - three rangers
- Kowanyama Aboriginal Land and Natural Resource Management Office (Coleman river) - one ranger
- Doomadgee and Burketown (Settlement and Gregory rivers) - six rangers
- Wenlock Outstation with Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation (upper Wenlock and Olive Pascoe rivers) - three rangers
- Normanton with Carpentaria Land Council (Staaten River and Morning Inlet areas) - three rangers.

#### Land and Sea Centres

Funding of \$998,000 is being provided for Indigenous Land and Sea Management in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 by the Department of Natural Resources and Water in partnership with the Commonwealth Government's Caring for Country program. This funding is being used to employ rangers to undertake land and sea management initiatives in Laura, Kowanyama, Napranum, Aurukun and Mapoon.

The focus of this funding is maintaining the operating of the Land and Sea Centres with a proven track record, whilst continuing to provide graduated support for those that will require a significant effort to build capacity from a comparatively low base.

Achievements to date include:

- The Aurukun Parkinsonia control program
- The convening of the Mapoon and Aurukun Traditional Owner steering committees
- Three rangers from the Agg Gnarra Aboriginal Corporation employed
- Working arrangements developed with the NRW Fire Management Unit and Napranum Shire Council
- Projects developed with the LamaLama Land Trust
- Projects developed with QPW North Region and Kulla Land Trust

The Queensland Government Wild River Rangers Program also supports the Land and Sea Centres. For example, in Kowanyama, Mapoon, Pormpuraaw and the Gulf.

#### Future Directions

The Commonwealth Government will invest \$90 million over five years to employ additional Indigenous Rangers under Caring for Our Country announced in March 2008. The Queensland Government will be seeking to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth Government and in consultation with Indigenous land and sea management organisations to provide funding through Caring For Our Country for ongoing investment in the provision of ecosystems services by and for Indigenous communities in Cape York Peninsula.

Currently the number of Indigenous Ranger positions able to be supported in Cape York is limited by the capacity of existing Aboriginal Local Councils and Indigenous communities to support either additional Land and Sea Centres or an expansion of positions in existing centres.

#### 1.4 Implementation of existing policies: Creation of sustainable employment

In addition to the Indigenous employment opportunities provided through the programs outlined above, the Queensland Government has been involved in a range of other business and tourism related activities in CYP.

The Queensland Government remains committed to the development of Indigenous Tourism and has already dedicated \$1million to the Tourism Action Plan for Cape York and the Torres Strait.

The Cape York and Torres Strait has enormous potential as a unique tourist destination and by working closely with local communities and industry it will help to create a brighter future for the Indigenous peoples of the Cape and Torres Strait.

Significant investment has already been made in the Cape and Torres Strait through the following initiatives:

- \$170,000 toward Lockhart River Aerodrome Motel
- \$160,000 for Umagico beach front Camping Grounds Infrastructure and \$310,000 for Budget Lodge and Accommodation facilities.
- \$37,355 for Camping Grounds Development at Chuula Camping Grounds
- \$28,434 for Camping Grounds Development at Massey Creek on Silver Plains Station.
- \$165,000 for tourist accommodation on Yorke Island
- \$45,000 for Coen Visitor Centre
- \$150,000 for Cape York Peninsula Area Signage Project
- \$95,000 for Camping Ground Development for the Mapoon Turtle Camp Eco Tourism business
- \$25,000 for visitor infrastructure and \$38,950 for mobile food van - Bloomfield Falls walking track and guided tours
- \$72,228 for Quinkan capacity building for centre management, business enterprise and guided tours development

The Queensland Government is keen to explore partnerships with the Federal Government on innovative programs like the National Landscapes Program for the benefit of the Indigenous peoples of Cape York. We will continue to explore options for additional ways to assist local Indigenous tourism operators as we continue to implement the plan.

As further areas of Cape York Peninsula are placed under protected tenures the opportunity arises to promote and present the natural attributes of the region to national and international tourism markets.

The Bligh Government's Great Walks program would also appear to have particular relevance to the Cape with the newly declared 160,000 hectare Kulla National Park on McIlwraith Range already identified as a potential site. Others are coming forward as the campaign progresses and it is expected that the Government will respond favourably to these. Wherever possible the employment and involvement of Indigenous interests in these commercial ventures will be strongly supported as will Traditional Owner involvement in park management.

### 1.5 Delivering Conservation and Indigenous Outcomes in CYP into the Future

As outlined above, over the previous two decades the Queensland Government has undertaken a challenging and ambitious agenda to deliver outcomes in CYP, in partnership with those who live there and those who take a passionate interest in its future. This has occurred in areas which traditionally have been the source of much conflict and division – land and economic justice for Indigenous Traditional Owners and communities; recognition and conservation of the region's internationally significant natural and cultural values, including its living Indigenous culture; pastoralism and mining interests.

In keeping with the spirit of the landmark Cape York Peninsula Heads of Agreement, the Queensland Government believes the way forward to achieve these multiple and often conflicting objectives is to ensure all those affected by decisions about land use and management in CYP are informed and consulted, and to the greatest extent practicable, able to participate in the forming of these decisions.

Many of the key elements of the Queensland Government's policy agenda in CYP are at critical points in their implementation with much investment and effort expended to date but with a great deal more work still to be done. These central elements include:

- CYTRIG - completing the land acquisitions program and finalising the resolution of tenures to ensure acceptable outcomes for both of the "dual purposes" including the hand-back of existing National Parks to Traditional Owners and finalisation of their attendant Indigenous Management Agreements.
- Wild Rivers – finalising the roll out of all agreed wild rivers in CYP
- CYPHA – progressing the work of the CYPRAC and CYP SCAC to deliver advice to Government on defining the Area of International Conservation Significance (AICS) and approving any the Indigenous Community Use Areas (ICUAs) and associated Special Indigenous Purposes, and establishing the Indigenous Regional Protected Areas Committee
- National and World Heritage Nominations and Listing processes.

#### Future Directions

The Queensland Government remains committed to delivering our policy agenda in Cape York Peninsula and our record to date is one of considerable investment and conservation and land justice achievements. However we take the view that an unfair burden of the financial responsibility for these outcomes, which are arguably both national and international responsibilities, has been carried by Queensland alone, particularly over the past 15 years.

With the announcement by the Rudd Government of their \$2.25 billion Caring For Our Country program an opportunity now exists for a significant new partnership between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments

The CFOC program will fund large-scale projects that can integrate actions across large geographical areas and key assets and achieve significant multiple benefits. It is envisaged that these projects will be delivered through partnership arrangements consisting of a range of stakeholders.

If re-elected, during the next term of Government every attempt will be made in successive budget rounds to identify additional funds for voluntary Cape York acquisitions and projects. We will aim to bolster these funds by seeking grants from the Federal Government and acquiring high priority properties in the Cape on a voluntary basis as they come on the market.

### **World Heritage**

A re-elected Bligh Labor Government will commit to undertake all work at the state level for a World Heritage nomination within its next term of government, to enable a World Heritage nomination to proceed with the consent of Traditional Owners within the next term of the Commonwealth Government.

A re-elected Bligh Labor Government will work collaboratively with the Traditional Owners and other landholders, including graziers, conservation organizations, the local community and the Commonwealth Government, to develop a World Heritage nomination for Cape York. CYTRIG will play a central co-ordination role in relation to strategic direction, process and high order policy on World Heritage matters.

The listing will be based on both natural and cultural heritage. This may result in a cultural landscape listing. A World Heritage nomination will require negotiated agreement with Cape York Traditional Owners for the relevant areas, the end result being one or more Indigenous Land Use Agreements. The underlying title and tenure of lands in the proposed world heritage area, will be resolved under the State Land Dealings process.

### **Policy Area 2: Keeping our rivers wild, securing our water**

The Queensland Government is committed to protecting and securing our unique environment, as part of our vision for Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland. Our Wild Rivers legislation aims to preserve the natural values of Queensland rivers for Queenslanders and future generations.

In June 2008 the Bligh Government committed to finalise the declaration of all 19 original wild rivers by the end of 2010. So far, Settlement Creek, Mornington Inlet and the Gregory and Staaten Rivers as well as streams on Hinchinbrook and Fraser Islands have been declared Wild Rivers. In addition, the Lockhart, Stewart, Archer and Wenlock Rivers were nominated for wild rivers listing in 2008.

It is clear only a Labor Government will continue to deliver on the Wild Rivers Initiative – under a National Party government it is clear this initiative would be lost. The National Party have never supported the Wild Rivers Act and continue to demonstrate their lack of environmental leadership through their inaction and lack of policy in this important area.

In contrast, the Bligh Government has outlined a program to progress all remaining Cape York Wild Rivers that have been committed to by 2010. This program was developed in consultation with the Wilderness Society, Queensland Resources Council, Cape York Land Council, Balkanu, Cape York Development Association, AgForce, and the Australian Conservation Foundation. This consultation is ongoing.

In addition to our commitment to implementing the Wild Rivers Act 2005 the Bligh Government has delivered on the Wild River Rangers Program, employing 20 Wild River Rangers across Cape York and the Gulf as part of the first stage of the roll out of the Wild River Rangers program. Refer to section 1.3 above for a detailed outline of where these positions are currently located and information about additional support for Indigenous land and sea management being provided by the Queensland Government in partnership with the Commonwealth Government.

#### **Future Directions**

A re-elected Bligh Government will also complete the program of Wild River declarations on Cape York Peninsula as outlined in recent correspondence to your Society. This will see a total of nineteen Wild Rivers declared, including those rivers already declared in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Cape York, Hinchinbrook and Fraser Islands.

To complement these nineteen rivers, a further three rivers – Crooper Creek, the Georgina and Diamantina Rivers - will be nominated and gazetted as Wild Rivers in the next term of Government in the Channel Country of south west Queensland.

In order to manage these rivers a re-elected Bligh Government will continue working towards delivery of our commitment to the employment of a total of one hundred Wild River Rangers, including the twenty already in place. Preference will be given to Indigenous people with traditional or strong links to these rivers to fill these positions.

Like World Heritage areas, Wild Rivers lend themselves to appropriate tourism development and Tourism Queensland will be encouraged to examine such possibilities in much the same way as they have done for Cape York. If needed, the Government will consider establishing a second category of Wild River.

#### **Policy Area 3: Protecting Landscapes, Biodiversity and Special Places**

The Environmental Protection Agency is advancing the preparation of a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and a re-elected Bligh Government will ensure that this work concludes in the next term of Government.

#### **Policy Area 4: Woodlands / Forests and Climate Change**

The Bligh Government has no intention of backing away from the South East Queensland Forests Agreement. The conversion of state forests into national parks (through the holding tenure of forest reserve) is an important contributor to the Bligh Government's target to protect 7.5% of Queensland as national park by 2020. The South East Queensland Forest Agreement remains one of Labor's most significant environmental achievements.

This is a stark contrast to the LNP who are on record committed to unpick the agreement at the first opportunity.

The focus of a re-elected Bligh Government will be the finalisation of the south-east Queensland work, further progress on western hardwoods and the commencement of work on cypress forests.



The Queensland Labor Government ended broadscale land clearing on the 31st of December 2006 delivering on our 2004 election commitment.

On the 18th of February 2009 the Premier released the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) report for 2006-2007. This report shows our ground breaking vegetation management laws are working to reduce broad scale clearing in Queensland. Clearing of woody vegetation is 37% lower than the previous year – down from 375,000 ha to 235,000 ha. This represents the lowest rate of clearing since SLATS commenced.

SLATS also reports a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions down from 41.24 to 31.55 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e over the last the reporting period - approximately 10 megatonnes – on track for 20 megatonnes from 2008 which is the Kyoto accounting period.

The National Party opposed the *Vegetation Management Act* and will certainly push the LNP to amend the Act to erode the environmental achievements made. At a minimum, they will decrease enforcement and increase the loopholes. Only the Bligh Government will provide the certainty to ensure the *Vegetation Management Act* is protected.

The Bligh Government continues to improve the environmental outcomes the *Vegetation Management Act* set out to achieve. The clearing of regrowth vegetation in rural areas will be the subject of consultation between the Government and relevant pastoral, conservation and other relevant stakeholder organisations to determine whether changes are needed to the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* to protect regrowth vegetation with significant environmental values.

The Bligh Government will give certainty over ownership of carbon in trees on leasehold land to pastoralists to give them an incentive to opt in to the Federal Government Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and to protect regrowth vegetation on their land.

The Bligh Government will work with the Federal Government to ensure the rules of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme encourage protection of regrowth vegetation.

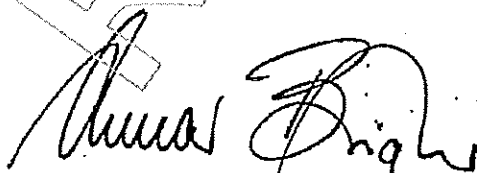
#### Policy Area 5: Mining and Energy

Finally, you are no doubt aware of the commitment given by the Bligh Government to maintain its opposition to uranium mining in Queensland. A re-elected Bligh Government will continue to maintain this policy position.

It is longstanding Queensland Labor Party policy that mining leases for uranium will not be granted in Queensland.

This is another clear area of policy difference between us and the LNP.

Yours sincerely



ANNA BLIGH MP  
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND

