



26 March 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By Email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

PRIVATE SENATOR'S BILL – WILD RIVERS ACT 2005

I make this submission on behalf of Advance Cairns in order to inform you of issues relevant to regional economic development in Tropical North Queensland so that they may be taken into account in the consideration of Senator Scullion's private Senator's Bill in relation to Queensland's Wild Rivers Act 2005 ("the Act").

Advance Cairns is the peak economic development agency for Tropical North Queensland and represents a wide ranging coalition including Local Governments, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Cairns Chamber of Commerce, Cairns Airport, Ports North (which runs the Queensland seaports north of Lucinda) and James Cook university.

We have reviewed the Act and are concerned that it has the potential to severely limit sustainable economic development on Cape York. These concerns are shared by our key stakeholder organisations with whom we have discussed this issue. We consider that these issues are very relevant at this time given the economic woes which are affecting our region. In the Cairns statistical division unemployment has been in the range of 12-14% over the last 6 months, and that figure is much higher on Cape York and generally in our indigenous population.

Our main concerns can be summarised thus:

1. Any river protection system for Cape York or indeed anywhere else should achieve economic, ecological, social and cultural sustainability. The thirteen Wild River declarations on Cape York should be revoked and ideally a proper holistic "Cape York solution" should be implemented as is envisaged under the Cape York Heritage Act. Such a solution would integrate national parks, river protection and world heritage issues, and would streamline and better allow

local input into and ownership of the various conservation and management arrangements. It would seem both logical and likely that the river protection system component of that would be designed to minimise adverse ecological impacts.

2. Cape York was already subject to over-regulation before the enactment of the Wild Rivers legislation. Enormous tracts of Cape York are already under conservation and preservation. The extra layer of regulation imposed by these laws is considered unnecessary, and seems to have been imposed without the usual impact statements and in the absence of any clear or imminent threat to the river systems. There was no rigorous consultation with stakeholders, and the legislation is not subject to review or appeal.
3. A national strategy for ecologically sustainable development (which the Councils of Australian Government have been party to since 1992) commits to enhancing individual and community well-being and welfare through economic development, while protecting biological diversity. Conversely, the Act severely and unnecessarily restricts economic development options, employment opportunities and the broader economic health of Cape York.
4. We see it as extremely unlikely that there can be any meaningful or constructive advancement on the question of the proposed world heritage listing of Cape York without resolving the current concerns regarding Wild Rivers.
5. We consider it crucial that policies affecting Cape York must be consistent with State and Federal welfare reform principles. The Wild Rivers declarations on Cape York undercut those principles, denying indigenous communities opportunities for social and economic advancement, as well as stripping them of hard-won rights to manage their own lands. It would be a tragedy if the Wild Rivers Act becomes yet another barrier that prevents indigenous people from causing economic activity to emanate from their main asset – the land that they have preserved over the eons. If these lands and rivers are indeed “wild”, then surely that is testament to their husbandry over that period.

Advance Cairns submits that it would be appropriate for the Senate Committee to meet and convene in Cairns to enable us to present our concerns in person and in greater detail.

Yours faithfully
Advance Cairns

Russell Beer
Chairman