

Media Release

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CASH COUNTDOWN FOR CASSOWARIES

With only weeks to go until a would-be developer pulls the pin on his offer to sell a cassowary corridor for conservation, the Mission Beach community is desperate for the Environment Minister or corporate sponsors to come to the rescue.

Known as 'Lot 66', the 60 acre rainforest block's owner last month issued an ultimatum to come up with the money within 60 days or he would pull the pin and put the block on the open market or submit a revised subdivision application. In response, community groups have reintensified their efforts and extended their appeals to the corporate sector.

Cassowary Coast Mayor Bill Shannon is fully supportive: "If there's one block that's going to preserve cassowary habitat and connectivity at Mission Beach, it's this block."

The block has a chequered history. In 2007, Council's planning scheme mapped it as a habitat corridor whilst including it in a residential zone.

In 2008, expert reports described Lot 66 as "very high quality vegetation ... a very significant linkage ... critical to long term movement of all fauna" and part of the longest and widest east-west rainforest corridor in Australia. A subsequent development application to subdivide the property into 40 house blocks resulted in Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett stepping in with new legislation to refuse approval.

The local community realised Lot 66 needed to be protected forever to help save the cassowary. In 2010, the owner expressed a willingness to sell the property for conservation. Local conservation organisation C4 committed their existing buyback funds to Lot 66 and ramped up fundraising.

2011, Terrain NRM coordinated a joint funding application from fifteen organisations to Ecofund Queensland to buyback Lot 66. Organisations included the local Agriculture Committee, Australian Rainforest Foundation, Bob Irwin, C4, CAFNEC, Community Association, Cassowary Coast Council, Rainforest Rescue, Save the Cassowary, Senators, Tourism, Traditional Owners, Wildcare and WPSQ. A concurrent submission was made to Queensland government's PACTS program.



Image acknowledgement: Liz Gallie

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In February 2012, C4 applied for \$500,000 National Reserve System funding to buyback Lot 66. Fifteen months later the Australian Environment Minister Tony Burke still hasn't announced the funding.

Both Ecofund and PACTS advised they would consider funding if the community was successful in securing Australian Government National Reserve System funding. Rainforest Rescue made a similar commitment. QPWS agreed to accept the property as National Park should the property be acquired. Cassowary Coast Alliance are petitioning Minister Burke to buyback Lot 66.

C4 have already raised \$260,000 of the \$750,000+ target. Donations to secure this highly valuable but threatened cassowary corridor in the tropical lowland coastal rainforest can be made via <http://c4communityconservation.weebly.com/lot-66-buy-back.html>.

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