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Habitat Matters

Landmark Decision For Mission Beach

Environment Minister Peter Garrett has acted to protect the iconic southern cassowary rejecting an application for residential development at Mission Beach using powers under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC)



The following are excerpts from the ministers speech the day he made the announcement at the Queensland Media Club.

"I'm always impressed by Queenslanders' conviction that they live in the best part of Australia".

"The World Heritage list records the places of

natural and cultural heritage that are of outstanding value to humanity on a global scale. Queensland is blessed with five of Australia's 17 World Heritage places.

The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics, help to attract massive financial input to the Queensland economy, and overall, tourism is the second largest export earner for Queensland. "Now more than ever, the health of the environment should be recognized as essential to the health of the Queensland economy.

But Queensland's natural assets are also under threat. Rapid urban expansion, overfishing, landclearing and declining water quality all pose major challenges.

In my role as Minister I am determined to ensure that developments with potentially significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance are carried out in an ecologically sustainable manner. In this way the Queensland economy will grow together with – rather than at the expense of – its environmental resilience.

Here in Queensland you have the opportunity to do it differently, to avoid some of the mistakes that have been made down south. Many of your ecosystems are intact, and you're already learning that you can keep them that way, as you build a sustainable economy and safeguard your natural assets - our precious environment - that is so essential to our future.

One of my recent responsibilities as Federal Environment Minister under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act was to consider an application for a residential development near within cassowary habitat at Mission Beach. The development would have subdivided about 24 hectares into 40 residential lots and involved vegetation clearing, earthworks, construction of a new access road and associated infrastructure. I was considering a number of factors as I reviewed this proposal.

This site contains what is known as 'essential habitat'. It contains remnant rainforest habitat and provides an important cassowary movement corridor between the habitat of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area and the coast. Even strict conditions wouldn't be enough to protect this vital corridor. Another was that land clearing and development have already had a dramatic impact on the cassowary - less than 25 per cent of this lowland habitat is intact.

This development would have had an unacceptable impact on the chances of this species' survival. The flow-on effects for tourism and the economy of farnorth Queensland are obvious.



Having carefully considered the likely impact of this proposed development, and the fact that even strict conditions would not be sufficient to protect the essential cassowary habitat on which the developer was proposing to build, I came to the view that I had no choice but to use my powers under the Act to rule out this proposal completely.

This is only the second time a proposal has been deemed 'clearly unacceptable' under the EPBC Act and rejected outright, so it is a significant decision. on local and potentially regional scales.

In the vast majority of cases considered under the Act, the potential impacts on matters of national environmental significance can be offset or minimised in some way."



"I urge land owners and developers in the mission Beach area to consult my department early to ensure developments do not result in adverse impacts on the local cassowary population" Mr Garrett said.