



Wild Rivers reference group
C/o Balkanu Development Corporation

11 November 2008

Dear members of the reference group,

Re: Letter and meeting re Wild Rivers nomination process

Thank you for your letter of Tuesday 28th October, and for meeting on Tuesday 4th November with my colleagues Tim Seelig, Glenn Walker, and Kerryn O’Conor regarding the present nomination of three Wild Rivers on Cape York Peninsula.

You have asked us to support you in having your concerns addressed by Government. We are committed to supporting Traditional Owners in their need for consultation and engagement in the Wild Rivers process, and are pleased to be able to work with you on this. However, I must emphasise that the Queensland Government is responsible for consultations, and any subsequent negotiations and decisions.

As we understand it, you have a number of individual issues arising from consultations to date, as well as a need for more time to discuss these issues amongst the community before coming to a conclusion on the Wild River nominations.

It was clear from the meeting last week that there are many areas of common ground between us. We support –

- ensuring that Traditional Owners receive full resourcing from Government to look after their rivers and country
- ensuring that either the Wild Rivers legislation or the declarations recognise and support the management of Indigenous cultural values of rivers, and
- ensuring that mining companies have to adhere to the same regulations as everybody else

Other issues such as the construction of boat jetties on private land and the small-scale harvesting of reeds are areas where we are keen to see the Government quickly develop a solution, as it is not in the spirit or intent of the Wild Rivers legislation to impede such sustainable activities.

These issues cannot be settled simply by making submissions but require a process of dialogue, debate and negotiation with the Queensland Government. For this reason, and based on our experience with the previous Wild River declarations in the Gulf of Carpentaria, we are of the view that the most constructive way to address your concerns is to move directly to a consultation and negotiation phase that will involve Traditional Owners and their representatives after the public submission period has closed.

We are sincerely of the view that to meet your concerns it is best that the Government maintain its current formal closing date for public submissions (which apply to other interests including ourselves). However, in support of Traditional Owners, the Wilderness Society will write to the Queensland Government seeking commitments for a dialogue similar to the Gulf of Carpentaria negotiations. We will also ask the Government to ensure that you have further opportunities to communicate your issues to them, once the high-level negotiations and a decision process has commenced. We will be in contact again once we have received a response.

The Wilderness Society wishes to ensure that views and concerns of Traditional Owners at a community level receive proper attention. If it were also necessary for supplementary submissions to the Government from Traditional Owners beyond the formal closing date, we would support extending this supplementary submission process to 24 December 2008.

We wish to see a meaningful dialogue and negotiation between the Traditional Owners and the Queensland Government regarding the declaration proposals for the Archer, Stewart and Lockhart River basins and we support ensuring this will take place at the earliest opportunity. Of course, in the end, the Government must make a decision on a way forward for all Traditional Owners, as well as for other stakeholders involved and the wider community.

We also welcome any opportunity to hold further discussions with Traditional Owners on these matters, so feel welcome to contact us to arrange additional meetings. We are happy to meet on Country if that will help to ensure a broader base of participation in the discussions.

We respectfully request that the entire group listed in the letter of the Tuesday 28th of October receive this letter, consider our proposed solution, and reply to us in writing.

We hope this addresses your concerns and look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Esposito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Anthony Esposito
National Manager – Indigenous Conservation Program
The Wilderness Society, Australia*

Cc
The Premier, Anna Bligh
Minister for Natural Resources and Water, Craig Wallace
The Chairman, Cape York Land Council, Michael Ross