

Forest buyback urged

Julie Lightfoot

lightfootj@tcp.newsld.com.au

CALLS have intensified for a land buyback scheme at Mission Beach, days after Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett stopped a subdivision in remnant rainforest.

Cassowary Coast Mayor Bill Shannon has supported calls for a scheme similar to the multi-million dollar Daintree rainforest buyback north of Cairns, which was controversially introduced two years ago.

"It ought to be looked at ... a lot of people are saying there



Peter Garrett



Bill Shannon

should be some sort of buyback arrangement for our environmentally sensitive areas," Cr Shannon said.

Mr Garrett exercised little-used powers on Monday to rule out a 40-lot residential subdivision on 24ha of forested land off Rockingham Close at Wongaling Beach.

He acted to protect the endangered cassowary, he said.

Conservationists had lobbied the federal minister, saying the land was a crucial link for cassowaries between World Heritage rainforest and the coast.

Developer Willmatt Holdings has not commented on the decision.

The company had proposed to limit clearing to 1000sq m on each lot and to impose environmental covenants on about 80 per cent of the land.

A spokesman for Mr Garrett said his ruling did not prevent another development proposal being submitted for the land.

"In the vast majority of cases, ways to mitigate or offset impacts can be identified but in this case the Minister took the view the impact on cassowary habitat was likely to be too great," the spokesman said.

Cr Shannon has hailed the decision, which over-rode the council and the State Government's processes, a "timely one in favour of conservation". He said it set a precedent in the Mission Beach area.

Mr Garrett and State Sustainability Minister Andrew McNamara yesterday said there were no plans to develop a buyback scheme for Mission Beach.