

Irwin Sr joins fight to protect the cassowary

Julie Lightfoot

lightfootj@tcp.news1d.com.au

BOB Irwin is heading north to protect the cassowary by promoting land buybacks at Mission Beach.

The father of Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin will visit the tourist town south of Cairns on Thursday with Rainforest Rescue delegates who are calling for the public's help with a voluntary land buyback scheme.

Mr Irwin has previously thrown his weight behind campaigns to save the koala and stop the Traveston Dam.

Rainforest Rescue's chief executive officer Kelvin Davies said the state and federal government's failure to move quickly on the matter had

convinced his organisation to swing into action, and enlist the help of a high-profile campaigner.

"We can't wait for the Government to start this (but) we will be calling on them and on local government to review development at Mission Beach," Mr Davies said yesterday.

The not-for-profit group has sunk \$600,000 worth of donations into land purchases in the Daintree and also has projects in Ecuador and Indonesia.

Mission Beach conservation group C4's spokeswoman Liz Gallie said about 40 per cent of the town's essential cassowary habitat was unprotected and a lot of that land was in urban areas.

Many other blocks of rainforest also needed protection but were not listed by Government as es-



Bob Irwin

sential habitat because they were regrowth forest.

She believes a successful buyback scheme would cost tens of millions of dollars.

Ms Gallie said the EPA had recorded 56 cassowary deaths in the past 15 years from cars, but when dogs and habitat loss were taken into account the toll was much higher.

Rainforest Rescue has been speaking with Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett about more land buybacks in the Daintree and will also be calling for help with Mission Beach.

Land packages would become nature reserves, Mr Davies said.

"We want this to be a national buyback initiative, there would be no rescinding of development rights as there was in the Daintree," he said.

"What we're calling for is voluntary buybacks of freehold rainforest properties."