

Peter Garrett stops Beach development

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett has rejected an application for a residential development at Wongaling Beach to help protect the southern cassowary and rainforest.

Mr Garrett invoked the powers under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 to stop a planned 40-residential lot subdivision at Lot 66, Rockingham Close.

Rockingham Close is located off Mission Circle, which runs off the Tully Mission Beach Road.

The development application, which was lodged by Willmatt Holdings Pty Ltd, would, according to the minister, have involved clearing vegetation, earthworks and the construction of a new access road.

"The southern cassowary is endangered and protected under the EPBC Act which means that projects or developments which have the potential to significantly impact on the bird or its habitat require my approval," Mr Garrett said.

"Only around 20 to 25 per cent of former cassowary lowland habitat remains today and this proposed development site is very important as a cassowary movement corridor between the adjoining Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area and the nearby coastal cassowary habitat.

"While it is often possible to identify ways to offset or minimise the potential impacts of a project or development like this, I don't believe that's achievable in this case and that's why I have taken the serious and unusual step of acting to rule this development out completely."

The developer has been advised of the Minister's decision but the *Tully Times* has been unable to contact them for comment.

"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.

Mr Garrett announced his decision during a speech to the Queensland Media Club in Brisbane on Monday.

During his speech Mr Garrett said the "clincher" in his decision was the impact the development would have on the survival of the rainforest.

"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."

NO TRAVESTON ACTION

While Mr Garrett spoke at length about the need to take action at Wongaling Beach he refused to be drawn on whether he would make a similar intervention to prevent the Traveston Dam on the Mary River in South East Queensland.

He would not pre-empt any future decision on the dam, noting that he would "look at the whole picture".

The lack of a clear position on the State Labor Government's proposed dam development drew a quick response from Queensland Liberal Senator, Ian Macdonald.

Senator Macdonald said he welcomed the Wongaling Beach decision and called on the minister to make a similar decision to protect an area noted for its endangered species.

"Mr Garrett has now set a precedent," Senator Macdonald said. "He has stepped in and used his ministerial power under the EPBC to stop a development in North Queensland to protect the cassowary.

"I call on him to use this ministerial power to also stop the Traveston Dam, where there are three species in danger of extinction if this environmentally reckless plan of the Blich Labor Government goes ahead."