

Pet ban plan to save big birds

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A LAND buy-back scheme and restrictions on cats and dogs are being recommended for Mission Beach in a bid to protect the town's trademark cassowaries.

A draft community plan proposes bans on clearing any more cassowary habitat, a voluntary buy-back scheme for critical land packages, traffic calming devices at cassowary hot spots on the roads and dog and cat-free subdivisions.

The Mission Beach Habitat Network Action Plan will be launched at the Eco Village on Clump Point Rd on Saturday from 10am.

Cassowary Coast Regional Council Mayor Bill Shannon said the endangered cassowary's future depended on the draft document being embraced by the community and built on via feedback.

He has backed the push for land acquisitions, saying one outcome of the plan needed to be funding for voluntary buybacks of land packages that could serve as "critical habitat linkages".

Habitat connectivity allowed the environment to bounce back after setbacks such as cyclones, he said.

Eleven cassowaries are known to have died in the 12 months after Cyclone Larry hit Mission Beach in 2006, destroying native food sources for the endangered birds.

Seventy-nine cassowary deaths were recorded in the 19 years from 1986-2004, and experts believe more "big bird" deaths went undetected.

The new community plan has been developed by Terrain NRM in conjunction with community stakeholders, scientists and government agencies.

Committee members said it was non-regulatory but they hoped to influence government and local government decisions and encourage incentive-based approaches to environmental management.

Mission Beach has been described as a sanctuary for wildlife and habitat, boasting the nation's highest concentration of cassowaries, half of its remaining licuala fan palm forests, habitat for 36 per cent of Australian bird species and wetlands of international significance.

*Residents can have their say on the draft plan by coming to the launch on Saturday, logging on to www.terrain.org.au/missionbeach or phoning 4043 8000.