

Subject: Wild Rivers Submission: A personal view

I live on the Atherton Tablelands and have travelled throughout Cape York over an extensive period of years. I have also followed the public discourse over Wild Rivers legislation since 2005.

Initially I believed the reports that this legislation was restricting the opportunities for economic development on Cape York and that this was frustrating the efforts of aboriginal peoples (and others) to develop business opportunities. Certain parties saw it as being in their interests to spread these rumors, however, on enquiry, I found that there had in fact been no sensible development proposals declined by the Queensland state government and that the legislation overall was well targeted to protect these river systems and control the type and extent of future commercial ventures.

It has been a cause of concern for some years that there are certain interests (let's call them feral *white fellas*) who, with compliant traditional owners have profited from the lack of control and supervision of the rivers to the extent that they have taken Barramundi and other fish by netting off entire sections of river and completely plundering and decimating the fish stocks in those areas. I have personally seen this happening in the Aurukun area and it is a tragedy.

With the legislation and the support of local rangers it appears that this form of illegal exploitation at least has been closed off leaving a properly regulated and supervised seafood industry throughout the Cape. This is the sort of economic development that the communities in the Cape need and this surely is the reason why effective ,targeted legislation and regulation was and remains necessary. Had the Queensland government taken the easy option and ignored the protection of these wild and pristine rivers then they could justifiably have been condemned but it seems irrational for the federal government to be seeking to overturn state legislation that is demonstrably in the interests of the environment, the people of Queensland, the people of Australia and, in particular, aboriginal communities in Cape York.

Rather than seeking to overturn the Queensland legislation it would be more productive for those who oppose the legislation to point specifically to the types of responsible and viable development that would be prohibited and then consider whether, in particular cases, ministerial discretion and intervention could be necessary to bring such projects to fruition.

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