



Wild Rivers inquiry report tabled today

A Parliamentary Inquiry which focused on Queensland's Wild Rivers legislation has rejected the need for the Abbott Bill, finding that the Bill would be counter-productive.

The House Standing Committee on Economics was asked to inquire into the important issue of Indigenous economic development in Far North Queensland, including the Cape York region.

After a series of hearings in the area, the committee found that Indigenous people in the far North areas of Queensland face a number of substantial economic challenges which include isolation, large distances and a lack of infrastructure.

But Committee Chair Craig Thomson MP said the Wild Rivers Act 2005 itself was not one of those challenges.

He said although there was room for improvement in implementing the Act, the legislation benefits Queensland by preserving the natural values of wild rivers while still permitting Indigenous economic development.

"The Committee did find there had been some criticism about the lack of consultation on the Wild Rivers legislation," said Mr Thomson.

"We also found there was a large degree of misinformation circulating about the Act."

"During the course of the inquiry the Queensland Government announced an important measure to improve its consultations and that was to establish Indigenous reference committees."

Mr Thomson said the Abbott Bill simply would not work.

"This Bill is not about the interests of Indigenous people," said Mr Thomson. "It is about Tony Abbott playing divisive politics with the lives of Indigenous people in Far North Queensland and Cape York."

The Committee found that Mr Abbott's Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 is a flawed document which is unworkable for a variety of reasons, including its use of ambiguous definitions.

"This Bill which seeks to override the Wild Rivers Act 2005 would result in confusion and division," said Mr Thomson. "It also puts the successful Wild Rivers Rangers program at risk."

The Committee has recommended a range of changes including that the Queensland Government strengthen its consultation and engagement framework for the Wild Rivers Act (see overleaf).

For media comment: please contact the Committee Chair, Mr Craig Thomson MP, on (02) 4351 1223 (Electorate Office) or (02) 6277 4460 Parliament House.

Recommendations

1. The Commonwealth Government continues to address the economic and geographical barriers to Indigenous economic development through its closing the gap programs across Australia and in particular, in Cape York; and the Queensland Government proactively affirm its commitment to addressing Indigenous disadvantage by pursuing place based initiatives for economic participation in Cape York.
2. The Committee notes the economic benefit of major infrastructure and investment programs and recommends that the Queensland and local governments in Cape York work with Infrastructure Australia and Regional Development authorities to progress these programs.
3. The Committee further notes the Indigenous training and employment benefits of major infrastructure and investment programs and recommends that Queensland and Australian Governments ensure these opportunities are maximised.
4. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government continues to partner with the mining industry to facilitate training and employment so that workforce participation in the industry becomes a mainstream employment option for Indigenous people.
5. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government mentors support network initiative be linked to Commonwealth Government initiatives for Indigenous small business development in business, tourism and administration.
6. The Committee recommends that the QLD Government strengthen its consultation and engagement framework for the *Wild Rivers Act 2005* (Qld). The Committee notes that the establishment of Indigenous reference committees group under the Cape York Sustainable Communities initiative is intended to address this and to work directly with Indigenous stakeholders on improving the Wild Rivers consultation process.
7. The Committee recommends that the Indigenous Reference Committee framework be developed and extended to service Indigenous peoples throughout Queensland on issues relating to economic development. It is important that all stakeholders be engaged in this process and endorse the framework.
8. The committee recommends that the Queensland Government provides information to Indigenous communities and individuals which assists them to step through the operation of the *Wild Rivers Act 2005* (Qld) and other conservation and land management legislation.
9. The Commonwealth support the Queensland Government in developing its strategic regional economic development plan for Cape York under its Sustainable Cape Communities initiative.
10. In consultation with Indigenous communities, the Queensland Government increase opportunities for Indigenous business partnerships under its Sustainable Cape Communities initiative.
11. That the House of Representatives not pass the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010.