

24th January 2010

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics Inquiry
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Dear Secretary,

I am an Angamutthi woman whose lands are in the area of the Northern Peninsula area across the Jardine and Ducie Rivers. I welcome the opportunity to make a late submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2010 (No2). I make this submission in my capacity as a traditional owner of the Western Cape area. I am solely responsible for its contents.

In making this submission in support of the Bill, which seeks to restore indigenous consent around land management and land use, I have the future of my children top of mind and a vision of an Australia without suppressive, racist, undemocratic laws such as Wild Rivers.

I urge that you consider our people as you would those who live in southern Queensland and not cast us a 'Wild' people (as this legislation does) in need of big city intervention to save the lands we have long protected. The word "wild" is a caustic marketing brand used to present a warm and fuzzy conservation image but perpetrates terra nullius foolishness. The word to indigenous peoples now symbolises the theft of our rightful roles as custodian of our homelands, the seizing of our environmental expertise, and the stripping of our rights to benefit from our own lands.

Indigenous people have been the preservers and conservers of our "wild" countries for tens of thousands of years. We are a minority peoples being dictated by extremists from the inner suburbs of the big southern cities determined to prevent any progress beyond hunter-gatherer. The southern "Save the Cape" campaigners don't give up the trappings of their real economies in their pursuit to turn our homelands into people-free zones. We bear the cost, not them.

There is no immediate threat to Cape York. The Cape needs no saving; where it is pristine and functioning, it is because of our expert environmental stewardship over tens of thousands of years.

When the Wild Rivers laws were proposed some six years ago, we heard about them during an election campaign. The Wilderness Society didn't consult with me, and the State ignored the advice and wishes of my people. We very soon realised the racism attached to this legislation. We had no voice, and now have no capacity to participate in management of our lands.

In 1993 when federal parliament passed the Native Title Act my people believed it marked the beginning of opportunity and the release of indigenous Australians from welfare domination. I cannot believe that 17 years later, we are again arguing our case as if little has changed. The Wild Rivers legislation undermines the best intentions of this and the previous federal governments to help indigenous people help themselves. The courageous struggles and gains made by our old people who fought for decades for the return of their lands and land rights has been overthrown by the Bligh government, this is 'unAustralian'.

I am a traditional owner. I want a land and water conservation management strategy, but a fair and just strategy that allows my people to participate in its determination.

Yours sincerely,
Tracey Ludwick