



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

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DECISIVE ACTION TO PROTECT MISSION BEACH CASSOWARIES

Environment Minister Peter Garrett has acted to protect the iconic southern cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius johnsonii*), rejecting an application for a residential development near Mission Beach in far north Queensland, using powers under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The planned development included the subdivision of Lot 66 at Rockingham Close into 40 residential lots and would 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.

“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, Willmatt Holdings Pty Ltd, has been advised of the Minister’s decision.

Mr Garrett said a great deal of work was underway in far north Queensland to protect this unique and severely threatened animal, including projects by the Federal Environment Department with the local community and other stakeholders to protect and re-establish habitat linkages for the cassowary.

Scientific studies on the Mission Beach cassowary population indicate this population is under severe threat. Land clearing and development has meant that most of the former cassowary habitat has been lost.

“The southern cassowary is a case study of how native species contribute to the overall resilience of an ecosystem.

“After the devastation of Cyclone Larry in 2006, the Queensland Environment Protection Authority and wildlife groups joined forces to provide food for the southern cassowaries around Mission Beach.

“They were driven to do this because they recognised the crucial role these birds play in sustaining the rainforest. In the Cape York Peninsula and the Wet Tropics, the southern cassowary eats rainforest fruits like native laurels, lilipillies and palms, and disperses the seeds in their droppings. So their survival was central to the regeneration of the area, and the long-term viability of rainforest communities.

“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.