

Wet Tropics Cassowary Conservation

CAFNEC feels very strongly that the current planning laws in North Queensland do not adequately protect prime cassowary habitat from development.

BACKGROUND

The endangered southern cassowary, *Casuarius casuarius johnsonii*, is a stunning symbol of the Wet Tropics landscape and it has been the focus of conservation concern and effort for decades. Current estimates suggest that there are less than 1500 cassowaries left in Australia.

Between urban development, roads and farmlands, cassowary habitat in the Wet Tropics has been severely fragmented. Development has also led to an increase in vehicle collisions and dog attacks.

CAFNEC has been working hard to protect our fragile coastline from inappropriate development and maintain corridors for endangered wildlife including the southern Cassowary.

Key Threats to the Wet Tropics cassowary population:

1. *Habitat destruction* from clearing (more than 80 per cent of coastal lowland habitat has gone)
2. *Habitat fragmentation* - much of remaining habitat is fragmented, isolating groups and disrupting movement
3. *Habitat degradation* through invasion of weeds such as pond apple
4. *Fencing*, which interrupts the movement of cassowaries
5. *Roads and traffic* - cassowaries are killed by vehicles on roads
6. *Dog attacks*- urban development brings more domestic dogs
7. *Hand feeding* - brings cassowaries closer to vehicle traffic and dogs
8. *Diseases*
9. *Natural catastrophic events* (cyclones)

PLANNING ISSUES

Key opportunities to effect change have come from a number of quarters. CAFNEC strived to ensure strong environment outcomes in the FNQ 2009-2031 Regional Plan. Now the Regional Plan has been finalised, we are working with the three Local Governments (Cairns, Cassowary Coast and Tablelands Regional Councils) to ensure that the Plan is strongly reflected in their local government planning schemes.

We have also engaged in attempts by the State Government to provide additional protection to the coastal environment – such as the Queensland Coastal Plan 2011 and the State Planning Policy on Protecting Wetlands of High Ecological Significance in Great Barrier Reef Catchments.

However, these instruments have numerous loopholes and we believe alongside other legislation such as the *State Development and Public Works Act 1974* do not provide adequate protection for

Queensland's wet tropical rainforests, the habitat for endangered species including the Southern Cassowary.

There is an opportunity to undertake a strategic assessment under the *EPBC Act* of the whole region, focussed on world heritage and threatened species. As this assessment must be linked to a plan, policy or program, this could be a strategic assessment of an existing plan (such as the FNQ 2031 Regional Plan) or a future plan (such as a Wet Tropics-wide Cassowary State Planning Policy).

PRIORITY NEEDS

We recognize and support the recovery actions identified in the Recovery plan for the southern cassowary, *Casuarius casuarius johnsonii* (EPA 2007). At the State level, a *Wet Tropics-wide Cassowary Conservation Plan (State Planning Policy)* would illustrate that the Government is taking its responsibilities towards cassowaries seriously.

Priority Cassowary conservation measures should include:

- Support for implementing Key Actions in the Cassowary Recovery Plan which was prepared with support from the Cassowary Recovery Team and included representatives from conservation, NGOS, indigenous, science, tourism, NRM Bodies, Industry, and three levels of government
- Development of legislative provisions such as a **Conservation State Planning Regulatory Provisions** or **State Planning Policy** to provide the strongest restrictions on development in areas where we know cassowaries are under the most serious threat
- Acquisition of strategic properties, and protection of key habitat and corridors including Lot 66 (Mission Bach), Ella Bay, False Cape and the Daintree
- Support for Local Governments to deal with development pressures and monetary compensation claims by developers
- Incentives for private habitat landholders to enter into voluntary conservation agreements
- Audit of existing development 'rights' in cassowary habitat throughout the region
- Address key threatening processes such as car strikes and therefore traffic management
- Funding for an integrated fauna crossing traffic strategy for key cassowary hotspots

OTHER KEY ISSUES

- Monitoring of population trends of cassowaries at key strategic sites is necessary. We still do not know if the Wet Tropics cassowary population is stable, increasing or decreasing.
- Partnerships with Traditional Owners and the wet tropics community is critical for success in any species recovery program.
- The community is an asset. We should use their skills in providing information back into local communities.
- A committed funding stream should be established.