



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC

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The Hon Niall Blair MP
Minister for Lands and Water,
niall.blair@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Blair

Proposed sell-off of Crown land

The Clarence Environment Centre (CEC) has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 26 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of the Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance.

In that respect, we are extremely concerned at reports that State Government is considering the sell-off of large swathes of Crown land, land that supports much of what remains of the State's remnant native vegetation.

So much of our landscape has been cleared that many of our unique flora and fauna are under serious threat of extinction, and climate change will exacerbate the problem. In fact scientists are predicting that as many as 30% of all species on the planet will become extinct by the end of this century as a direct result of global warming. So should we be alarmed by this major loss of biodiversity? Well consider this.

Biodiversity provides us with everything we eat, much of what we wear, many of the drugs that keep us healthy, along with numerous industrial products. Most importantly though, biodiversity provides us with oxygen, and clean water, two elements without either one of which, we humans could not survive. So yes, we must be concerned.

One of the critical requirements for species struggling to survive the impacts of climate change, is a network of vegetated corridors to allow migration of those species to cooler areas where they have a chance to cheat the extinction cycle. Crown land, in the form of travelling stock routes provide a perfect basis for such a network, and must be protected against further fragmentation, something that will occur if sold off.

The management of crown land over the past 200 years has been less than satisfactory, and the costs associated with that management are significant. Therefore, we believe there could be a case for the selective sale of some crown land, particularly those now isolated small portions that appear across the landscape.

Having said that however, we strongly believe that any remnant vegetation on crown land must be protected against all development, and this would be best achieved by the placing of an in-perpetuity conservation covenant on all crown land before sale.

We also believe that there are many individual land-owners that would be prepared to acquire and manage those portions for conservation, particularly if in the future, carbon trading opportunities could offer some income to cover the costs of that management.

On the other hand, many of our crown lands currently support areas of high conservation value, containing critical habitats such as the Macquarie Marshes, and Gwydir Wetlands, with some areas leased to neighbouring landowners for grazing, a recognised key threatening process which places severe stresses on wildlife that is dependent on those habitats. These areas are simply too important to be sold off, and must be protected under the national parks system.

In conclusion, we urge you, as Minister, to consider the long term implications of selling off crown land, and ensure all areas of high conservation value, including recognised wildlife migration corridors are fully protected under the reserves system, and place strict conservation covenants on all other crown land prior to its being sold.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary
Clarence Environment Centre