



*CAIRNS AND FAR NORTH  
ENVIRONMENT CENTRE INC.*

Queensland  
State Election 2009  
CAFNEC POLICY  
POSITION PAPER



**Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.**

PO Box 323N, Cairns, Qld. 4870

T: (07) 403 21746 F: (07) 405 33779

E: [campaign@cafneec.org.au](mailto:campaign@cafneec.org.au) [www.cafneec.org.au](http://www.cafneec.org.au)

*CAFNEC champions the environment of the Far North through its campaign, advocacy and community work. Our precious region is under significant threat from climate change, unsustainable coastal development, limited wildlife protection and management, proposals for dams and the underutilization of existing mechanisms to deliver regional sustainability.*

*During this election CAFNEC urges voters and politicians alike to embrace the protection and management of the Far North environment which underpins our economic prosperity and way of life. Urgent action on a range of areas is required to safeguard our sustainable future.*

# Key Policy Recommendations

## ***Climate change***

1. Commit to the inclusion of regional greenhouse gas reduction strategies and targets within an appropriate statutory instrument, such as amending the newly released *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031* accordingly

## ***Preserving ecological function and improving landscape scale resilience***

2. Provide dedicated statutory protection of wildlife corridors identified in the *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031*, triggered by development assessment and environmental planning processes.
3. Implement appropriate conservation management arrangements for private land holders including conservation covenants, cooperative management and other agreements, land for wildlife, Nature Refuges.
4. Local governments be proactively supported in providing rates-based incentives for voluntary conservation measures on freehold land
5. A commitment to actively promote and fully resource voluntary conservation measures for all privately held tenures in the Wet Tropics, Gulf and Cape York.

## ***Coastal protection***

6. Protecting local icons:
  - a. Buy back and rehabilitate Ella Bay
  - b. Support strong local government plans for coastal communities with high projected growth rates or where threatened species impacts are escalating - *e.g.* Daintree, Innisfail.
7. Reform the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*:
  - a. Cancel or sunset (after a fixed period not exceeding two years) all pre-IPA approvals, re-assess under current standards of environmental and coastal protection if there is a wish to proceed with the development. .
  - b. All new and uncommenced development proposals must be subject to the same current standards of regulatory controls and environmental protection, regardless of tenure, zoning or unused historic approvals.

## ***Water***

1. No commitment to new dams in the FNQ Water Supply Strategy. In particular the proposed Nullinga Dam on the Walsh River.
2. No dam on the Gilbert River, or other Gulf rivers.

# Acting to protect our region from Climate Change impacts

There is a strong environmental, moral and economic case for Far North Queensland to take a leading role in tackling climate change. Individually, we are high emitters of greenhouse gases living in a region that depends greatly on the continued health of our land and seascapes for the very viability of our communities.

Scientists continue to provide compelling evidence of our region's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and that climate change is already having a marked impact on the reef and rainforest resources that to a great extent underpin our regional economy<sup>1</sup>. More recently, concerns have been raised by climate scientists that anticipated impacts may have been greatly underestimated.

The region possesses vastly under-utilised renewable energy resources in the form of sun and wind. Yet we remain addicted to wasteful long-distance power transmission sourced from highly polluting coal fired power stations to the south. There are clearly significant potential gains from increasing energy efficiency. This entails a commitment to delivering energy services to local and regional production and supply alternatives which maximise renewables.

Solar hot water and solar power systems are ideal solutions for rural and remote Australia. Remote communities on Cape York Peninsula and in the Gulf country are frustrated by the lack of technical and trades support for renewable energy alternatives. It can take months to get solar hot water or solar power systems installed. Obtaining timely servicing of these systems is equally difficult. Ensuring reliable and viable alternatives for rural and remote communities is an imperative, given climate change impacts on traditional supply infrastructure.

## **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Commit to including regional Greenhouse Reduction Strategies and Targets within an appropriate statutory instrument, such as amending the *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031* accordingly.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ These targets should be at least:
- ◆ Reduce energy demand by 30% by 2020.
- ◆ Set a renewable energy target of 25% by 2020.
- ◆ A climate neutral standard in Queensland for all new development.
- ◆ Institute an incentives scheme protecting regrowth vegetation and a strengthened *Vegetation Management Act 1999* for land subject to erosion and degradation.
- ◆ Public transport usage targets of 20% by 2015 for both regional centres and regional communities (see also transport planning section below).
- ◆ Investigate the regionalised renewable energy production and supply.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.reef.crc.org.au](http://www.reef.crc.org.au), [www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/)

<sup>2</sup> Strategies and targets should be consistent with an equitable contribution to keeping global atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions below 450 ppm, with an ultimate aim of reductions to pre-industrial CO<sub>2</sub> levels.

- ◆ Adoption of the gross feed-in tariff model for the Solar Bonus Scheme to enable household generation of renewable energy through amendment of the *Clean Energy Act 2008*. Increased support for remote community access to renewable energy solutions, including supporting remote area local government authorities to transition from diesel generators to stand-alone renewable energy alternatives, provision of programs for installation, servicing and training to enable communities to manage their own solar power systems.

## **Achieving regional sustainability**

Far North Queensland is facing a future of unsustainable population growth that entails changes to existing land use patterns and industry. In addition to this, the climate of the region will change over the coming decades. Both factors require careful planning if we are to retain our natural assets and the lifestyle we currently enjoy.

If we fail to outline an appropriate and realistic vision for our region, we risk losing much of what sustains our regional biodiversity and economy.

The *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031* provides a start on the path to a regional planning approach in the far north. It sets an urban footprint to prevent urban sprawl as well as potentially increase the protection to some threatened species through the identification of strategic rehabilitation corridors.

Nevertheless, apart from piecemeal efforts at preserving corridors there is no regional biodiversity strategy designed to ensure the ongoing survival of our local wildlife such as the endangered Southern Cassowary or other iconic Wet Tropics species. This serious failing mirrors the debacle arising out of the South East Queensland Regional Plan's failure to accommodate similar provisions to protect the Koala, where the Queensland Government scrambled *after the fact* to apply band-aid solutions for threatened species preservation.

### **Policy recommendations**

- ◆ Development of a set of sustainability indicators, targets and thresholds to be implemented through the *FNQ Regional Plan 2009 – 2031* review process. These should include realistic sustainability indicators, targets and thresholds which can be monitored continuously, and which trigger decisive intervention and remedial action when breached.
- ◆ Amend the *FNQ Regional Plan 2009 – 2031* to undertake a rigorous ecological carrying capacity assessment and analysis of the far north Queensland region in the context of projected climate change impacts, and to do so in an iterative manner incorporating new information about the rate and scale of those impacts during the assessment process.

## **Preserving ecological function and improving landscape scale resilience**

Far North Queensland is fortunate to have many outstanding natural areas included within the protected area estate. However these areas were historically not strategically located and thus cannot perpetuate natural ecological processes. Other adjacent regions, such as the Gulf savannah country have very few protected areas. At the ecological community level, all regions have significant communities which remain under-represented or unrepresented within the protected area estate, but which are vital for the survival of wildlife populations.

Historically, conservation areas were often selected either for aesthetic or recreational qualities, or because they were seen as containing little value in terms of extractive resources. As scientific rigour was absent from many of these past decisions, park boundaries often do not conform to ecological boundaries and many lesser known regional ecosystems remain under-represented (or unrepresented) within the local and/or regional protected area estate.

## ***Protected Areas***

Through its policy document *Tomorrow's Queensland Towards Q2* the State has prioritised expansion of the Queensland protected area estate to secure unique biodiversity; protect green space through regional planning processes; provide outdoor recreational facilities and develop a state-wide public recreation land inventory. *Q2* recognises rapid urban development as being the biggest threat to natural habitat and green spaces. The *Q2* Green Queensland - Land conservation target is to protect 50% more land for nature conservation and public recreation by 2020 (the current extent of the protected area estate is 7.6% of the State).

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Substantially increase resources for conservation and land management for the existing protected area estate.
- ◆ Provide substantial resourcing for all newly created protected areas.
- ◆ Provide incentive funds for improved management of accredited protected areas established on private or community-held lands.
- ◆ Prioritise the buy-back of privately-held lands critical to establishing robust wildlife corridors and native habitat linkages at local and regional levels.

## ***Cape York***

Cape York's diverse range of landscapes and ecosystems are home to many spectacular flora species found nowhere else in Australia. Its huge tracts of forests and heathlands, extensive wetlands and largely unlogged lowland rainforests provide habitat for eclectus parrots, green pythons, foxtail palms and the spectacular palm cockatoo. Broad scale bauxite mining threatens huge tracts of this largely undisturbed landscape, clearing huge areas of woodland and forest, and sucking up water resources.

### **Policy recommendation:**

- ◆ Resource a World Heritage nomination process for identified areas of Cape York Peninsula including a process with the free, prior and informed consent agreement of Traditional Owners.
- ◆ Ongoing resourcing of Indigenous employment to support the return of country to Traditional Owners.

## ***Wildlife corridors***

In the Wet Tropics region, urban expansion and intensive agriculture has severely fragmented and degraded landscapes outside protected areas, effectively confining wildlife to habitat 'islands'. These are often too small to support viable populations and preventing wildlife from moving from one protected area to the next.

Ensuring wildlife can move when stressed, and indeed are able to sustain viable populations where continually encroached upon by human land uses, is essential in the context of climate change. In the face of climate change, these corridors will provide wildlife with the chance to adapt and move as their environment changes around them.

Wildlife corridors are as vital to fauna and flora as transport corridors are to our present economic life. Without legal protection, wildlife corridors will continue to be lost, eroded or degraded, and many more species will follow the Southern Cassowary down the path to regional extinction.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Provide dedicated statutory protection of wildlife corridors identified in the *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031*, triggered by development assessment and environmental planning processes

### ***Voluntary conservation measures***

There are a variety of conservation agreements and covenants available between private landholders and State and local government agencies for the conservation of natural areas<sup>3</sup>. Opportunities for landholders who voluntarily adopt nature conservation commitments on their land should be maximised. These agreements provide cost effective protection of remnant habitat and foster community ownership of local biodiversity resources.

Voluntary conservation measures should be supported through land tax breaks, rates relief and other incentives. Unfortunately, this support is not available in all local government areas and, in areas where such incentives have been offered in the past, financial circumstances are forcing councils away from continuing these schemes, such as in the former Johnstone Shire. There is real benefit in a State Government commitment to ensure statewide support of various voluntary conservation measures.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Implement appropriate conservation management arrangements for private land holders including conservation covenants, cooperative management and other agreements, Land for Wildlife, Nature Refuges.
- ◆ Abolish the regionally-biased quota system for Nature Assist and Nature Refuge programs administered through the EPA.
- ◆ Land tax breaks for voluntary conservation measures are made available for all landholders on freehold and leasehold land.
- ◆ Local governments are proactively supported in providing rates-based incentives for voluntary conservation measures on freehold land.
- ◆ A commitment to actively promote and fully resource voluntary conservation measures for all privately held tenures in the Wet Tropics, Gulf and Cape York Peninsula regions.

### ***Nature Assist***

The Nature Assist program prompts landholders to tender for conservation and land management works on private land. These incentives are critical to supporting private engagement in land rehabilitation and restoration for environmental benefit, with the potential to generate better management practices and improved productivity.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.caloundra.qld.gov.au/website/cityenvironment/environment/VCA.asp](http://www.caloundra.qld.gov.au/website/cityenvironment/environment/VCA.asp);  
[www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/bccwr/assets/main/lib533/vca\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/bccwr/assets/main/lib533/vca_fact_sheet.pdf)

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Commit resources to allow for the continued expansion of the Nature Assist program - minimum of \$7 500 000 for the coming term (based on past term investment of \$5 700 000).
- ◆ Remove all quota based Nature Assist restrictions.

### ***Daintree - finishing the job***

The Daintree covers a very narrow strip of coastal lowland and upland rainforest and wetlands, including around 1 120 subdivided lots of either uncleared, partially cleared or cleared rainforest between the Daintree River and Cape Tribulation. Despite three previous Commonwealth, State and local government 'buyback' programs and planning initiatives, almost 200 blocks of land in the area remain threatened by potential urban development. It has been estimated that \$20 million is required in order to buyback these remaining lots and halt the continued fragmentation of this irreplaceable biodiversity. The reinstatement of the Conservation Infrastructure Management Fund could provide ongoing funding for the purchase of land and other conservation outcomes.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Retain the existing legislation which prohibits the extension of mains power across the Daintree.
- ◆ Retain the existing ferry service.
- ◆ Implement a 'conservation' fee for the ferry to raise funds for further purchases of land north of the Daintree River, including the Forest Creek area.
- ◆ EPA to reinstate its Nature Refuge program in the Daintree.

## **Protecting coastal localities - Ella Bay, False Cape, Bramston Beach, Mission Beach**

Our iconic coastal communities are under increasing pressure from urban development, and local wildlife is heavily impacted on by human-related activities in these locations (traffic, domestic animals etc). Climate change impacts further exacerbate these pressures.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Buy back and rehabilitate Ella Bay.
- ◆ Support strong local government plans for coastal communities with high projected growth rates or where threatened species impacts are escalating - eg: Daintree, Innisfail.
- ◆ Require False Cape hillslope safety and stability to be investigated before any further construction works occur.
- ◆ Resource local government and local communities adequately to enable effective collaboration with local, regional and State organisations, agencies and NGOs.

# Conserving threatened wildlife

## **Cassowaries**

Despite some initiatives over the past few years, there have been no positive changes in securing the population of the Southern Cassowary. The population of this endangered keystone species is uncertain, with estimates varying between 1000 and 1500 birds. Whilst this is a dangerously low number of individuals, the situation is further compounded by the fragmented nature of remaining habitat and the ongoing pressure on the species from loss and fragmentation of habitat, mortality from vehicle strikes and dogs, and unknown impacts associated with feral pigs. Further, pressure from tropical cyclone Larry has impacted upon the population and incessant coastal development continues to remove essential habitat jeopardizing the future of the species in this area. Without urgent action to ensure adequate habitat protection and connectivity, this important population will continue to decline, significantly increasing the risk of local extinction due to stochastic events.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Resources to implement cassowary and other threatened species (mahogany glider, northern bettong) protection measures in *FNQ Regional Plan 2009-2031*.
- ◆ Funds for voluntary acquisition of key threatened habitat and corridors.
- ◆ Funds for incentives for landholders to voluntarily protect threatened species habitat using a number existing mechanisms (Nature Assist, Land for Wildlife, Trust for Nature).
- ◆ Reinstate the Nature Refuge program in Wet Tropics.
- ◆ Funding for an integrated fauna crossing traffic strategy for Mission Beach, Daintree and Kuranda areas.
- ◆ Implement a Master Plan for Mission Beach and other areas of critical cassowary habitat.
- ◆ Fund the joint Queensland and Federal Government program “Saving the species of the Wet Tropics” to implement the above recommended measures with one third Queensland Government funding and two thirds from the Federal Government (minimum total of \$30 000 000 over four years).

## ***Frogs: Habitat protection and threat management***

Although there are considerable areas of protected habitat in Far North Queensland, including habitat essential for a range of frog species, there are too many threatening processes degrading the quality and functionality of these areas in the Wet Tropics. The encroachment of human development around the edges, including agriculture and housing, and through protected areas, including roads and tourism, needs to be better controlled. Particularly damaging to frog populations is erosion, siltation, pollutants, weeds and feral animals, especially pigs which do untold damage to frog habitat not just in rainforests but basically all bodies of water that frogs inhabit. Tighter controls on development, and processes such as road maintenance to reduce runoff from roads into streams, especially building projects during the wet season, are especially required.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Increased protection of existing protected areas through improved management to mitigate threats including weeds, feral animals, negative tourism impacts, infrastructure bisecting areas etc.

- ◆ Enforcement of sediment control for developments and road maintenance to improve protection of waterways.
- ◆ Public education to increase knowledge about frogs and their habitats, and sustainable use of the environment with regard to frogs, for example places like Crystal Cascades and Stoney Creek near Cairns, which support populations of endangered stream-dwelling frog but also heavy usage by people.

### ***Risks from emerging pathogens***

Aside from the disappearance of many upland frog species from the Wet Tropics rainforests due to the chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytridium dendrobatides*), the Cairns Frog Hospital has discovered new disease threats affecting all frog species. These include pathogens such as new viruses that have not yet been isolated, excessive parasite loads, cancer, immune deficiency, a variety of fungal problems and, in recent years, a dominance of bacterial pathogens including three species which cause bacterial meningitis. Increasingly human diseases are turning up in frogs with the risk that these pathogens could be transmitted back to humans, *i.e.* wildlife carers. This is an important issue that warrants investigation.

There is limited capacity within QPWS to explore these emerging threats from new pathogens nor has there been training of staff to recognize diseases and develop appropriate collection and handling procedures, this gap could be putting field staff and volunteers at risk.

#### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Biosecurity Queensland to establish a secure holding and treatment facility to enable proper containment of all pathogens.
- ◆ Biosecurity Queensland to assist the Cairns Frog Hospital to access appropriate pathology and toxicology testing at the vet school of the University of Queensland.

### ***Spectacled Flying Fox***

The ‘vulnerable’ spectacled flying fox has suffered a serious population crash in the past few years. This species, along with other nectar-feeding flying foxes and some birds, play a critical role in the ecology of the Wet Tropics’ forests, as they act as both pollinators and seed dispersers. Increasing habitat fragmentation, and mortality caused by human activities (both deliberate and accidental) will cause further population losses in these species, causing long term fundamental changes in forest ecology.

#### **Policy Recommendation:**

- ◆ Develop and implement a Conservation Plan for nectarivores, to protect habitat for birds, spectacled flying fox and other flying foxes and gliders that are dependent on nectar. Including protection of long-range pollinators to assist eucalypt adaptation to climate change.

## ***Mahogany Glider***

The endangered Mahogany Glider (*Petaurus gracilis*) is one of Australia's most threatened arboreal mammals. It is found only in the southern Wet Tropics of North Queensland and is highly mobile being dependent on continuous open forest or woodland to range freely. The main threats to this species include clearing which has severely fragmented and modified suitable habitat with only 20% of its former habitat remaining (Kemp et al. 2006). Altered fire regimes, weed invasion and intensive grazing threaten the structure and ecological integrity of remaining habitat fragments. Isolation of populations and the decline in habitat quality are major threats to the species' survival. Major transport corridors also disrupt glider movements and there have been a number of recorded road kills on the Bruce Highway (Mahogany Glider Recovery Plan, May 2008).

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Secure the scientifically supported minimum critical habitat required for the continuation of the species in the wild (acquisition of land and its long term management).
- ◆ Update the relevant Regional Vegetation Management Codes with current maps identifying critical habitat to protect this habitat from further fragmentation and degradation by clearing for development, grazing and other impacting activities.
- ◆ Implement actions under the Mahogany Glider Recovery Plan including developing strategies to conserve mahogany glider habitat on private lands and reducing threats from transport and easement corridors.
- ◆ Fund the joint Queensland and Federal Government program “Saving the species of the Wet Tropics” to implement the above recommended measures with one third Queensland Government funding and two thirds from the Federal Government (minimum total of \$30 000 000 over four years).

## **Protecting water for humans and the environment**

Ensuring a reliable water supply for our growing region remains a critical issue and in every State election there are simplistic calls for more dams and increases in water allocations. If effective demand management and other supply options are sustainably employed, it is unlikely that increases in supply via new dams will become necessary for the Far North region in our lifetime.

The FNQ Water Supply Strategy (yet to be finalised), must consider new water supply options only after efficiency and demand reduction measures have been exhausted. The Nullinga Dam proposal has been previously dismissed as unnecessary, too expensive and uneconomical. This remains true today<sup>4</sup>. Its reliability for water storage is also yet to be confirmed.

Development can be accommodated sustainably without new dams in Cape York and the Gulf. Only a fraction of existing water allocations in the Gulf region have ever been utilised<sup>5</sup>.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ No commitment to new dams in the FNQ Water Supply Strategy. In particular the proposed Nullinga Dam on the Walsh River.
- ◆ No dam on the Gilbert River, or other Gulf rivers.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24233393-5005340,00.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cafnec.org.au/temp/Gulf%20WRP%20Sub%20-%20Final.pdf#page=5>

- ◆ Commitment to maximum use of efficiency measures in new Master Planned developments.

## **Protecting the marine environment**

Whilst past federal measures around rezoning, together with the recent round of funding commitments via Reef Rescue, should improve the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef, more is needed to be done to ensure the reef's long term survival. Recent State Government regulatory improvements will also help strengthen the effort to save this global treasure.

### ***Climate change***

Only a concerted global effort to keep greenhouse gas levels below levels that will cause catastrophic damage to the world's coral reefs will save the Great Barrier Reef, and Australia must be at the forefront of these global efforts. To date our in this area have done little, but to help ensure the demise of the Great Barrier Reef (see Climate section for policy response).

Resilience is key if the Great Barrier Reef is to survive climate change impacts, and ecosystem health is the key to resilience. Reducing threats from land based pollution sources is fundamental to improving reef resilience.

### ***Pollution***

The recent Reef Water Quality Protection Plan needs to be backed-up by monitoring and reporting that can pinpoint priority areas, successes and failures of the plan and facilitate effective adaptive management actions.

### **Policy recommendation:**

- ◆ Cut reef pollution to 50% by 2013 through new land use regulations, better coordination, a Reef Report Card, a Reef Catchments Commission and strong implementation of the leasehold land strategy.

### ***Fisheries***

Numerous complaints from recreational fishers' organisations along the North Queensland east coast raise concerns of significant reductions in the numbers and sizes of inshore fish species caught in the inshore coastal waters and estuaries of North Queensland. Although largely anecdotal, when whole communities are unanimous about these reductions, their concerns must be taken as a reliable indicator that overfishing is occurring and, at the very least, the Precautionary Principle should be applied according to existing law and sustainable management practices implemented.

State government regulators have allowed a blame game to develop between recreational and commercial fishers over depleted stocks. Currently there is widespread anger amongst the 750,000 recreational and charter fishers that the new regulations introduced on 1 March 2009 do nothing to halt the overfishing that they believe is largely being caused by netters targeting pre-spawning aggregations or schools of inshore species, other than barramundi.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ That the Primary Industries and Fisheries Minister within six months of the election, commission an independent follow-up study to the Garrett Review of the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery (which was completed in November 2008) to:
  - investigate community concerns relating to overfishing of inshore fish species in FNQ,
  - prepare a “road map” for the way forward by which DPI&F are able to recognize and rectify existing levels of overfishing,
  - create opportunities to rebuild depleted inshore fish stocks,
  - optimise the economic returns from the resource.
- ◆ The study should be carried out by the best available fisheries management specialists in Australia and be independent of DPI&F. It should undertake a participatory risk analysis evaluation of the inshore fishery, both commercial and recreational (including charter fisheries)<sup>6</sup>.

## **Integrated Planning Act – coastal development**

The coastal regions of Queensland are all facing the common problems arising largely from the failings of state planning instruments to deal with population growth, booming property markets and a system that does not deliver sustainability. Compounding this is the lack of political will to curtail development, a determination to view past approvals as valid and to support perceived use rights attaching to previous approvals.

Prevention of the ongoing fragmentation and loss of habitat has become critical to the functioning and integrity of many coastal landscapes including of course the ongoing survival of many species. The conservation movement has long identified the need for a development approvals process that is consistent, open and transparent.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Cancel or sunset (after a fixed period not exceeding two years) all pre-IPA approvals, re-assess under current standards of environmental and coastal protection if there is a wish to proceed with the proposed development. .
- ◆ All new and uncommenced development proposals must be subject to the same current standards of regulatory controls and environmental protection, regardless of tenure, zoning or unused historic approvals.
- ◆ Amend the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971*, to prevent the fast-tracking of resort developments, such as is currently underway at Ella Bay near Innisfail.
- ◆ Develop a readily accessible database of lodged applications to enable any interested party to quickly identify the likely impacts of any proposed developments.
- ◆ Develop a website to enable ready access by any interested party to the information lodged with any application and approval, including downloadable documents. (This website could be set up as per the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* website for referred and controlled actions)<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> (For further information please see [www.cafnec.org.au/election/fishing.pdf](http://www.cafnec.org.au/election/fishing.pdf)).

<sup>7</sup> For further information please refer to the CAFNEC Integrated Planning Act Reform - Discussion Paper <http://www.cafnec.org.au/election/IPA.pdf>

## Planning for future transport needs

Transport more than most areas illustrates the failure by government to implement planning within a framework of ecological sustainability. It would seem that what has passed for transport planning in North Queensland has not so much been an anticipation of what the future holds and where we need to go, but rather an extrapolation of the past.

With the recognition of the phenomenon of peak oil by governments worldwide, along with other influences of global oil prices, now is the time to update thinking around transport planning to ensure we meet the needs of the future in an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable manner.

The lack of attention to proper planning around public transport, and developing a sense of community has delivered us an urban sprawl model at odds with community needs and a growing need for efficient use of fuel.

### **Policy recommendations:**

- ◆ Improve public transport services to achieve a 20% use rate by commuters by 2015.
- ◆ Create a regional public transport coordination body to oversee a regional approach to public transport planning and investment.
- ◆ Explore alternative transport solutions for the Kuranda Range Road
- ◆ Prioritise the use of the existing rail networks for both freight and passenger travel, and developing options for an integrated low carbon commuter transport network for the Cairns region.

## Supporting community based conservation organizations

Community conservation groups are critical environmental watchdogs, tracking environmental planning processes and alerting decision-makers to important issues affecting their local and regional natural environment. These groups are essential to government consultative processes and for robust, informed decision-making.

### **Policy recommendation:**

- ◆ Increase State funding allocations for small and medium sized environmental, not for profit groups to increase community resilience and responsiveness to critical environmental issues including climate change. General allocations have not increased over the past decade - seeking a minimum increase of 30% per grant.