

QLD to axe Qld Wild Rivers declarations

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CAIRNS, Nov 4 AAP - The leader of Queensland's opposition party has angered green groups with his pledge to axe controversial environmental protections on the Cape York Peninsula. Liberal National Party Leader Campbell Newman on Thursday announced an LNP government would scrap Wild Rivers declarations over four Cape York river catchments. The declarations are unpopular with some traditional owners in the region, including indigenous leader Noel Pearson, who argue they stifle economic development in impoverished areas.

The Wilderness Society, the chief proponent of the Wild Rivers laws, immediately condemned the move as "environmental vandalism" and warned it would lead to more mining developments in the region. Mr Newman said the Wild Rivers legislation was part of a "dodgy deal" with the Greens to secure preferences in the state's southeast. "Ultimately it has been about green preferences, not green outcomes," he told reporters in Cairns.

He said an LNP government would establish a "Bio-region management plan" in consultation with traditional owners and other stakeholders to protect pristine areas of Cape York. It would also employ an extra 30 indigenous rangers in the area over the next three years, he said. "Our plan would actually see all of Cape York properly managed, properly protected, for the long term benefit of all Queenslanders."

However, Mr Newman said the LNP policy did not extend to abolishing declarations in other parts of the state, including the Gulf of Carpentaria. Wild Rivers declarations, made under legislation passed in 2005 by the Beattie government, restrict development in affected river basins, especially within 1km of a river stream or tributary. Wilderness Society campaigner Gavan McFadzean said the decision would allow pristine rivers to be dammed and large scale mining projects to go ahead in environmentally sensitive areas.

"The voters of Queensland should be on high alert, this decision shows that a Newman government will be an environmental wrecker," he said. "Queensland has some of the most pristine and intact rivers in the world and now they are under substantial threat from coal mining, from bauxite mining and coal seam gas"

However, Mr Newman said any development applications in the region would have to meet normal state and federal environmental requirements. Ms Bligh said the LNP's plan would turn Cape York into "an area for rampant development" without adequate protections. "Campbell Newman may want to jump into bed with Tony Abbott on the environmental destruction of Queensland, we're not going to stand

idly by and let that happen," she told reporters in Brisbane.

"The traditional owners of the rivers that have been protected support Labor's legislation, and Noel Pearson 's support of the LNP's proposal should be put into perspective. "He is not a traditional owner of any of this land, or any of this territory."

Ms Bligh said Queenslanders who wanted the state's most precious environmental assets protected should be alarmed by Mr Newman's position. "Today we see the first sign that under a LNP government we will see rampant development in our most precious wilderness areas," she said.

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