



## Gladstone Conservation Council Inc.

Queensland, Australia.  
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### Coal Seam gas industry funds expansion of Curtis Island conservation area

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To: Hon Andrew Powell MP  
Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection  
GPO Box 2454, Brisbane QLD 4001  
[Environment@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:Environment@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

Andrew,

With some fanfare I note the publicity splurge “celebrating” a landmark conservation initiative that will see nearly two thirds of Curtis Island, near Gladstone, set aside for environmental conservation, ensuring the protection of the island’s unique ecology and heritage for future generations.

I suffer mixed feelings, because “unique ecology and heritage” were not the words used by government when they pushed for the industrialisation of this World Heritage listed Island. I recall terms like “it’s a heavily degraded section of the island” being used. It is therefore with measured pleasure that I note your acknowledgement of the high and unique ecological and heritage values of the area.

While you bandy obfuscatory percentages of 44% protected where just 2% was laid to waste, I would just like to remind you that 100% of Curtis Island is on the World Heritage list, to be protected in perpetuity for future generations. I grant you that World Heritage listing offers no protection in your hands given the fact that the industrialisation of Curtis Island has occurred. Thus I note that this landmark conservation initiative will see nearly two thirds of Curtis Island somehow protected by some covenant with superior quality to that provided by World heritage listing. Clearly in your reckoning World Heritage listing does not constitute an obligation to protect.

The Delbessie arrangement provided for sustainable use, protection and rehabilitation of rural leasehold. It was a ground-breaking multi-lateral partnership between the Queensland Government, AgForce and the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society. Executed as intended it could provide superlative environmental outcomes. You chose to abolish the agreement thus removing this form of environmental protection of the leases on Curtis Island. Your decision to abandon the Delbessie arrangement is however consistent with Campbell Newman’s approach viz:

*The Queensland Premier has told the Wentworth Group that one of the ‘most important’ reasons his government passed legislation to weaken Queensland native vegetation laws, allowing property owners to clear native vegetation of high conservation significance, is to: ‘present new opportunities for landholders to use this vegetation to gain financial and environmental benefits through offset arrangements that may be sought by industry.’*



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Had the environmental protection authority discharged their obligations under the Delbessie arrangement when the Monte Cristo lease was last renewed, any damaging activities by the graziers on Curtis Island could have well and truly been contained. Instead the opportunity was botched. Had the Delbessie arrangement been applied as intended, the current charade of a protective veneer being applied now would not be possible.

An article in Queensland Country Life suggests Monte Cristo has been owned by US interests for over 30 years and its principal lives in Los Angeles, a setting far removed from the Central Queensland coast. It is not as if the lease holder would be asked to forfeit a residential stake on the island.

I note reference to “protection” being via conservation or national park as part of an offset package:

The offset package announced today has included:

- The purchase of the Monte Cristo property on Curtis Island (3,562 ha of freehold and leasehold lots).
- The protection of more than 8,700 ha of land either as newly declared conservation park or national park, or existing protected areas upgraded to national park under the Nature Conservation Act.
- Removal of cattle grazing from acquired areas in the Curtis Island Conservation Park and Curtis Island State Forest.

This does not mean much in real terms in Queensland as demonstrated by your approval to have Bimblebox nature refuge swallowed up by a coal mine, your approval to dump dredge spoil in our World Heritage marine park, your authorisation to allow the grazing in national parks when it suits you, your active promotion for developments in national parks and natural reserves. You will not exclude gas extraction from these areas and this is pertinent for Curtis Island as it is known to include strata of the Stuart Oil-shale and will very likely come under pressure for fracked gas extraction in the near future.

Concatenating all this, I would suggest that this is perhaps your most audacious Shyster con trick perpetrated on the Queensland people yet. You take away the protective arrangements for the ecology on leasehold land by dumping the multi-lateral Delbessie agreement, then pay millions in compensation to overseas interest to secure the property, promise to reinstate some form of environmental protection which you have previously shown not to honour and then you promote this as a wonderful example for the use of biodiversity offset provisions when in fact the area is already supposed to be protected by World Heritage status.

Distilling it down, millions of dollars have gone overseas and there has been no net change in environmental protection while on the other hand thousands of hectares of regionally significant ecosystem have physically been bulldozed of World Heritage listed Curtis Island to make way for industrialisation.



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This is a bad deal for Queenslanders, it is a bad deal for World Heritage, and it is a bad deal for the environment. It is a con.

You have proven yourself unworthy of the highest office in the state for the protection of our environment.

Shame on you

Jan Arens

President – Gladstone Conservation Council