



Wild river rangers and Australia Zoo to form a new partnership

The Bligh Government has marked today's Steve Irwin Day commemorations with a poignant and significant partnership with Australia Zoo to provide mentoring and training experience for rangers working in Queensland's unique Wild Rivers region.

Premier Anna Bligh today joined Australia Zoo director Terri Irwin to announce the Memorandum of Understanding which will offer Wild River Rangers an opportunity to broaden their experience in wildlife handling and management issues under a new partnership with Australia Zoo.

"It may also provide exposure for the rangers to international networks and the ecotourism industry, as many rangers are traditional owners who are keen to start their own tourism ventures on their land and sea country," Ms Bligh said.

"The Wild River Rangers program has been an overwhelming success with 27 rangers employed so far – and more to be employed this year - to work with landholders, communities and traditional owners to protect and promote the state's declared wild river systems in Northern Queensland.

"The government has invested in excess of \$8M to date in the wild river ranger program and is interested in finding ways to further developing its relationship with Australia Zoo, which has expressed a long-term commitment to mentor, train and provide employment opportunities for Indigenous people.

"This will provide them with an opportunity to share their invaluable traditional knowledge about conservation and cultural heritage.

"In the future it's possible for the partnership to be formalised with a 'ranger exchange' or rotational placements which will provide Wild River Rangers and zoo rangers with opportunities to further network and develop new skills in a different environment."

Director of Australia Zoo Terri Irwin said the signing of the MOU was an important step toward securing the future of Indigenous people and the future of the wildlife and habitat along the Wenlock River in Cape York.

"Signing this MOU signifies our dedication to providing ongoing opportunities with Indigenous people and the proactive management of the Wenlock River," Mrs Irwin said.

Mrs Irwin also said that signing the MOU on Steve Irwin Day – November 15 – was a poignant announcement to honour Steve's legacy.

"Signing the MOU on Steve Irwin Day is particularly significant as we further the work Steve was so passionate about. Steve felt it was important to work with Indigenous people to protect wildlife and wild places."

Natural Resources, Mines and Energy Minister Stephen Robertson said the partnership would complement and build existing relationship between Australia Zoo with a number of Wild River Rangers.

“The Australia Zoo and the Wild River Rangers have worked together in the past and this has provided worthwhile teaching and learning experiences for both parties,” he said.

“For example, Terri Irwin has shared crocodile capture and release technique with Indigenous rangers, including Wild River Rangers, at the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve.

“Wild River Rangers have also participated in biodiversity surveys at the reserve.

“The Queensland Government is committed to making these training opportunities available to other Wild River Rangers and helping to facilitate the collaboration between Australia Zoo and the Wild River Rangers program.

“Our Wild River Ranger workforce undertakes important estate management duties, including the protection of natural and cultural heritage and key land management responsibilities such as pest and fire management.

“The involvement of traditional owners in maintaining healthy country has significantly benefited the broader community, resulting in improved management and a better understanding and awareness of Indigenous cultural heritage issues.”

For further information contact Department of Environment and Resource Management Media Services Ph: (07) 3224 7792 or email media@derm.qld.gov.au

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