

ONLINE TODAY

www.theaustralian.com.au



POINT OF ORDER Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott face off today in the first question time since the election. For stories, images, live streaming and a live blog, go to www.theaustralian.com.au

SURFING Surfing writer Fred Pawle wraps up the first two days of the French leg of the world surfing tour. See his video report at www.theaustralian.com.au

TELSTRA The beleaguered telco today conducts its annual briefing for institutional investors. For the latest, go to www.theaustralian.com.au/business

IN THE PAPER TODAY

WORLD B0-12 North Korean leader Ki

CHURCH FINDS INDIGENOUS OBJECTIONS LEGITIMATE

Wild rivers 'erode rights'

SARAH ELKS
NORTH QUEENSLAND
CORRESPONDENT

THE Anglican Church has accused the Queensland government of an unjustifiable erosion of indigenous property rights by impeding sustainable development through its Wild Rivers Act.

The church will today release the report — described as the "most forensic economic study of its kind ever undertaken by the church in relation to the effect of any legislation on indigenous people" — which claims the rivers law removes the right of indigenous people to earn money from

the sustainable development of their land.

The Wild Rivers Act, introduced by the Queensland government in 2005 and designed to protect 10 Cape York river systems, promises to be a hot topic in the new federal parliament, with Tony Abbott pledging to introduce a private member's bill in an attempt to overturn the law.

The chairman of the Anglican social responsibilities committee, Dean of Brisbane Peter Catt, said the report's findings showed the objections to the law from affected indigenous communities were legitimate, despite repeated claims to the contrary by the state government.

"The prohibitions and restrictions of the Wild Rivers legislation will adversely impact people's livelihoods by taking away without their consent the ability to derive income from sustainable development," Dr Catt said in a statement last night.

The Queensland government argues that the laws do not prevent new development, and says that activities such as mining, aquaculture and animal husbandry can occur if they meet special conditions.

Earlier this year, the Anglican Church entered into the debate for the first time, releasing an initial report condemning the laws for having a negative impact on

indigenous wellbeing. The new report, written by economist Joanne Copp and commissioned by the church committee, says the legislation allows for only "very limited agricultural, urban and industrial development" within a certain distance of the protected rivers.

"This is particularly problematic because these areas (referred to by local residents as river land) are the most productive and therefore most viable land for those relying on the land for their income," the report says.

It suggests the government has "mistakenly replaced sensible conservation values with harmful preservation values".

"In trying to keep the environment as it is now (preservation), they have compromised opportunities for development and wealth creation," the report says. "They have ignored other more rational approaches which recognise the dynamic nature of the environment and the fact that with sensible management and monitoring, the land can be both productive and protected."

With the release of the report, the church has renewed its calls for the government to revoke the Wild Rivers declarations on four of the Cape York river systems and to impose an immediate moratorium on further river declarations.

BER staff
finally

Keating wins for 'ordinary' folk

