



● Ergon workers prepare to erect a pole that will be part of a rope bridge while a cameraman captures it all

Catalyst TV crew arrives

By CHRIS McCOOMB

An innovative approach to making roads more fauna-friendly is being trialled on the Palmerston Highway and has caught the attention of the ABC's science program Catalyst.

The collaborative research program is a joint initiative between James Cook University's Rainforest Co-operative Research Centre and the Department of Main Roads, and will test whether animals will use rope bridges to traverse between different sections of the rainforest that have been divided by the road.

Previous research has proven that possums and others will use bridges up to 15 metres across roadways – this project will see if wildlife will use similar bridges up to 48 metres long.

Main Roads environmental con-

sultant David Rivett said the rope bridges would be combined with other research, including radio-tracking of certain species, to find out whether overpass structures were effective as connecting paths for animals. It is believed that some rainforest species of possums are suffering from in-breeding.

A Catalyst camera crew and presenters were on site yesterday morning.

Ergon Energy employees were also there, donating equipment and labour to erect the poles featuring in the bridges which are situated about 15-20kms up from Crawford's Lookout.

Mr Rivett said Ergon Energy had funded "connectivity studies" in the past and some of the findings would be integral to the new studies.

If the project is successful, the overpass system may be applied on highways across the country.

"Many road authorities are moving towards improving the ecological performance of their highways and the Palmerston project will answer questions specific to the Wet Tropics," Mr Rivett said.

Ergon Energy regional services manager Geoff Bowes said the company was delighted to help the research efforts to lessen day-to-day impact on the environment and endangered species.

Yesterday's filming comes hot on the heels of an Australian Geographic Magazine crew, including adventure reporter Sorrel Willoughby, descending on the Mission Beach and Cardwell area to shoot footage for a tourism DVD.