BRISBANE - A mining boss has rejected claims that bauxite contributes to unique ecosystems in a Cape York wildlife reserve named after the late Steve Irwin.

University of Queensland Professor Craig Franklin says highly-acidic water springs, believed to be caused by a reaction with bauxite in the area, have created the ecosystems.

Prof Franklin, who was a friend of the late Crocodile Hunter, says 35 new ecosystems have been recorded on the reserve so far, supporting new species of fish, reptiles and birds.

The Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve - a 135,000-hectare property northeast of Weipa on Cape York Peninsula - has been at the centre of a battle with mining giant Cape Alumina.

Cape Alumina won a court battle to access about 15 per cent of the reserve to conduct environmental studies for possible bauxite mining.

Cape Alumina boss Paul Messenger says there is no scientific data to back up Prof Franklin’s views.

“Hydrological investigations conducted by Cape Alumina to date have found no causal effect or connection between the existence of bauxite in the area and the acidity levels found in the springs,” he said.

The debate is stirring a lot of emotion, with Terri Irwin and Russell Crowe teaming up to lead a push to stop mining in the reserve and almost 150,000 people signing an online petition.

But Dr Messenger questioned the professor’s classification that the springs were “unique” as ecologists had mapped more than 100 similar springs in the area north of Weipa. AAP