

Adventurer warns sites pegged for development in Kimberley are a threat to native animals and tourist trade

# NW mining a threat to tourism

KATIE HAMPSON

Australian TV personality and adventurer Malcolm Douglas has made an impassioned plea to make the Horizontal Waterfalls and its surrounds a World Heritage site, saying current mining and exploration proposals risked destroying vital parts of the Kimberley region.

Douglas, who made his name on television as Australia's original crocodile hunter, said he was stunned to be told the number of sites in WA's North-West that have been pegged by international mining companies for the development of gas, bauxite and alumina.

One example was the Japanese company INPEX, he said, which is drilling at the Maret Islands 400km north-east of Broome as part of its proposed \$20 billion LNG plant.

Douglas said the nearby Montgomery Reef was home to humpback whales, dolphins, dugong, turtles and manta rays which would be put at risk

if not protected.

Referring to a recent trip to the 270sqkm reef, he said: "We saw 12 whales in five minutes one day there. It was wonderful to be in an area that has not been exploited and you can see fish jumping everywhere."

He also predicted there would be 5000 boat movements a year in the region which would further destroy the marine life.

"Some people think the Kimberley can cope with this development over the next 15 years but we want this pristine wilderness to last 500 years," Douglas said.

Speaking at the Parks and Protected Areas conference in Fremantle yesterday, he said a recent research paper classified the region as the largest, untouched savannah woodland in the world.

He hoped this would help justify its place on the world heritage list alongside treasured places such as the Taj Mahal of India, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China and

Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

He insisted he was not "anti-development" or "Green" but broke down in tears as he warned West Australians not to take the region's natural beauty for granted.

The Horizontal Waterfalls had already been touted by naturalist and BBC broadcaster David Attenborough as "one of the greatest natural wonders of the world", he said.

The region also has outstanding cultural and heritage values including Aboriginal Wandjina and Bradshaw paintings which Douglas fears will also come under threat if the State Government fails to put conservation before mining and exploration.

Currently, more than 830 sites of special natural or cultural importance enjoy protection under a 1972 UNESCO convention and Douglas said he would make a formal submission to the Kimberley Land Council for heritage protection in the next few months.



Malcolm Douglas