

Kimberley to be focus of major study

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A major study of the wild and isolated West Australian Kimberley coast will help protect its unique resources from uncoordinated future development.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the state and federal government assessment would help coordinate future industrial development in the region known for its ancient artworks, rugged coastline and a vast inland wilderness.

It also is home to massive and potentially lucrative reserves of liquefied natural gas and oil.

"So rather than dealing with a number of development proposals in an ad hoc way and risking the slow destruction of our environment and heritage, we will proactively use federal environment law to ensure that any future development has a minimal impact on the things we value and love," Mr Garrett said.

WA's acting Development Minister John Kobelke said one of the study's aims would be to find a single location for a shared industrial hub.

"This will give us a detailed picture of all the regions environmental assets including national and international heritage values," Mr Kobelke said.

Kimberley Land Council executive director Wayne Bergmann welcomed the commonwealth and state governments' move on behalf of local indigenous groups.

"But we would remind them that the informed consent of the traditional owners is crucial to the go-ahead for any development of gas resources in the Kimberley," Mr Bergmann said.

"That includes consultation regarding the location of any processing hub or development plants."

Conservation groups, including the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) also backed the study.

ACF Northern Australia manager Jann Crase said it was a responsible move by both governments.

"We all know the Kimberley is a beautiful place, but it's also a big place and we have very little data on many of its natural and cultural values, so this study should not be rushed," she said.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert gave cautious support to the study but said a comprehensive long-term planning approach was needed.

"It is crucial that the planning process is comprehensive - that it considers all types of industrial developments - not just gas projects," Ms Siewert said.