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$180m heritage funding boost to aid Kimberley

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Protection of the world's biggest remaining sub-tropical savannah that starts in the Kimberley and stretches across the Top End to Cape York will be boosted as part of a $180 million injection into Australia's national reserve system.

The five-year funding announced yesterday is the first money to come from the Rudd Government's new-look natural heritage initiative — the $2.25 billion Caring for our Country program.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the $180 million would be provided to conservation groups, farmers, indigenous communities and all levels of government to create new reserves and protected areas.

The Kimberley will gain priority under the funding.

"This new program has clear priorities, including targeting bio-regions with low levels of protection," Mr Garrett said.

"These include the sub-tropical savannah from the Kimberley to Cape York, the Mitchell grass country of north-west Queensland and arid central Australia."

He said the investment would leverage at least another $90 million in cash and kind through partnerships.

Yesterday's announcement coincided with a CSIRO report calling for new protected areas to conserve ecosystems threatened by global warming.