

Northern development won't damage environment

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A CSIRO water scientist says farmers can develop more of Northern Australia for agriculture without damaging the environment.

There's a renewed push to explore whether the Federal Government should encourage more farming in the north after its 2020 ideas summit in Canberra at the weekend.

Critics say farmers have already misused water in the south, and many northern soils are unsuitable for development.

But the chairman of the CSIRO's Water for a Healthy Country Program, Don Blackmore, says science has moved on from past mistakes.

"I think there are very positive opportunities in Northern Australia," he said.

"We won't make the same mistakes as we did in the south by not understanding the biophysical setting, the salinity setting and all those things.

"You know whether we lead development there, it will go there by itself, so it would be better for us to get on the front foot now and start leading it."