

# Balance the key, says KLC

Protecting the cultural heritage of indigenous Australians must be balanced against opportunities to secure their economic future, the Kimberley region's traditional owners say.

The Browse Basin off the Kimberley coast has massive gas reserves potentially worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

The pristine coastline is also home to turtles, dugongs and sensitive coral reefs, and is precious to the traditional owners of the Kimberley region, represented by the Kimberley Land Council (KLC).

Balancing the economic benefits against protecting the land and the cultural heritage of his people is a huge challenge and one that is not taken lightly, KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann says.

"This is a challenge, it's at the heart of what we're trying to do, to weigh up and balance the environmental and economic (concerns)," he said in a speech at the National Press Club last week.

"We're not afraid to say: 'No' (to development). If anyone knows anything about the history of the land council - we've said 'No' often."

However, Mr Bergmann also says economic empowerment for Aboriginal communities is the best way to ensure responsible development.

"The resources boom must deliver for all Australians, and, in particular, the Aboriginal people on whose land it takes place and who are directly affected," he said.

"Development of gas reserves off the Kimberley could deliver revenue of \$20 billion per year."

The KLC has called for the State and Federal governments to support the traditional owners in finding the balance between economic, environmental and cultural values.