

Conflict forces Minister to sit out LNG debate

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Environment Minister Donna Faragher has a conflict of interest which bars her from dealing with one of the most important aspects of her portfolio because her husband works for LNG giant Woodside.

The situation means Mrs Faragher will not be handling environmental issues surrounding the choice of site for the LNG hub in the Kimberley, described as the biggest single environmental issue facing WA.

Planning Minister John Day is handling the issue in her place.

Mrs Faragher did not declare the conflict of interest until after she was given the environment portfolio.

Her husband, Scott Faragher, was removed from Woodside's executive operations relating directly to LNG exploitation of the Kimberley's Browse Basin.

But environmentalists said the environment minister's job should have been given to someone without such a conflict.

Wilderness Society director Peter Robertson said yesterday: "It seems like an extraordinary situation. From an environmental point of view we would want a minister who can make decisions across the board."

Mr Robertson said environmental groups were not happy at having their concerns dealt with by the planning minister. "The planning minister has his own agenda, and often that is in conflict with the environment. The planning department is often a proponent of major developments that we would be opposed to," he said.

Conservation Council of WA director Piers Verstegen said the situation was "not completely ideal", though he did not criticise the Government's handling of Mrs Faragher's position.

"I would be criticising it if there were a conflict of interest and they weren't delegating that responsibility," he said.

Colin Barnett said Mrs Faragher was only precluded from dealing with issues relating specifically to Woodside.

"It's not as though Donna is excluded from issues to do with the Kimberley at large," the Premier said.

He said Mrs Faragher's appointment in no way lessened the standard of environmental assessment.

Groups with concerns over Woodside's activity could contact either Mr Day or

himself, he said.

He maintained Mrs Faragher was an "excellent choice" as Environment Minister.

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