

Negus joins Kimberley fight

By SIMON PENN

THE fight being waged to save the remote Kimberley coast from industrialisation has a new ally in Australian media heavyweight George Negus who has thrown his considerable clout behind the campaign.

Lobby group Save the Kimberley recently took its message to the waters of Sydney Harbour in a bid to raise awareness on Australia's eastern seaboard, hosting 85 high-profile guests aboard charter boat True North.

Mr Negus was among those in attendance and has since pledged his support to the campaign which aims to limit the impact from plans to process Browse Basin gas in the region.

Mr Negus, speaking to the *Broome Advertiser* from Japan, said he had only a vague awareness of the issue before the Sydney event.

"I think a place like the Kimberley shouldn't be out of sight and out of mind for the rest of the country," he said.

"A campaign like this will wake up a lot of people in the south-west and the south-east as to how important this part of the country is.

"When somebody talks about it being a wilderness heritage of international standing I listen, and that's what it appears to be. This isn't just a piece of Australia, it's a piece of the globe that needs to be protected."

Mr Negus said he was impressed by Save the Kimberley's approach and particularly that it was advocat-

ing a compromise to resource companies with a proposal to build a single gas processing hub.

"Controlled industry is desirable in that area, but uncontrolled industrial mayhem isn't," he said.

"These people aren't ranting lunatic greenies and feral protesters, there're people from the local indigenous people, people running eco-tourism up there, and they're people to be listened to.

"They're not people saying 'hands off', they're not people saying 'lock it down', they're people who are saying 'this is how we can go about it'.

"It's not your normal rabble-rousing operation, it's a very sane, sensible approach."

Mr Negus denied being just another celebrity jumping aboard a cause and said he saw his role in the campaign primarily as a political agitator. He called for the fight to be carried out on two fronts - with public protest as well as political campaigning.

He said the fact that one of the main players, mining company Inpex, was part-owned by the Japanese Government made it an issue of international political significance.

"I don't think (Federal Foreign Affairs Minister) Stephen Smith ... can ignore this as a West Australian, and he should be banging on the Japanese Government's door," he said.

Mr Negus also rejected calls for

the developments to go ahead as a means of providing financial help to indigenous communities in the region, saying that argument was fraught with danger and threatened to continue welfare dependence.

"If people are trying to tell me that some industrialists are interested in the welfare of the indigenous people, then pull the other one," he said.

He said that if throwing money at problems in Aboriginal communities was the solution, they would have been solved long ago and it did not justify destroying a wilderness.

Mr Negus admitted his own exposure to the Kimberley had been limited to date but said he intended visiting as soon as possible to learn more about the area and the issue.

Save the Kimberley spokesman Peter Tucker said that following the Sydney trip a similar event was planned for Canberra in May and a visit to the Kimberley by a contingent of east coast politicians and media was also planned for June.

Those travelling from the Kimberley for the event included wildlife park owner Malcolm Douglas, traditional owners Albert Wiggan and Neil McKenzie, fishing guide Robert "Bluey" Vaughan, photographer Hugh Brown and filmmaker Richard Costin. Among those invited were resources companies involved in developing the Browse Basin, with a representative of Woodside attending.



IMPACT: George Negus, pictured at a previous lecture in Perth, says he will act as a political agitator to safeguard the Kimberley