



Governments launch landmark Kimberley planning study

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The federal and state governments will embark on a major planning assessment of Western Australia's unique Kimberley region, expected to be the most comprehensive study of the region's values ever undertaken.

It will be the first time a federal and state government have agreed to undertake a strategic assessment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

"We are making sure we understand in advance the region we wish to protect, before choosing a site for future industrial development," federal environment minister Peter Garrett said in a statement today.

"The Kimberley has outstanding landscapes and wildlife, glorious coastal stretches, and invaluable Indigenous and historic heritage. It also contains massive reserves of oil and liquefied natural gas, of huge economic value to the nation and offering financial benefits to local indigenous communities."

Mr Garrett said neither government wanted piecemeal project development, with multiple ports and processing plants along the Kimberley coast.

"So rather than dealing with a growing number of development proposals in an ad-hoc way and risking the slow destruction of our environment and heritage, we will proactively use federal environment law to ensure that any future development has a minimal impact on the things we love and value."

Western Australian acting development minister John Kobelke said one of the aims of the study would be to find a single location for a shared industrial hub.

"The identification of a hub will be followed by a wider strategic assessment of the Kimberley, in consultation with conservation groups, industry and indigenous landholders," Mr Kobelke said in a statement.

"This will give us a detailed picture of all the regions environmental assets including national and international heritage values."

Kimberley Land Council Executive Director Wayne Bergmann welcomed the joint move.

"But we would remind them that the informed consent of traditional owners is crucial to the go-ahead for any development of gas resources in the Kimberley," Mr Bergmann said.

"That includes consultation regarding the location of any processing hub or development plants."

Greens senator Rachel Siewert said her party had been calling for a regional development strategy for some time, and it was crucial that it considered all types of industrial development- not just gas projects.

"We want to see a single hub that caters for all industries...We cannot afford to identify and develop a hub site that cannot also handle the siting and transport needs of downstream industries," she said.

"We do not want to repeat the mistakes of the Pilbara."

-with AAP