

Kimberley coast to be study subject

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THE Kimberley coast is to be the focus of a new scientific study aimed at steering its future development.

One of the world's last wilderness enclaves, the study aims at identifying the gaps in knowledge and pinpointing major priorities for further scientific work.

Scientists believe the waters and coast harbour some of the most extensive coral fringing reefs in the world but factual scientific knowledge of the area is minimal.

The study, commissioned by the WA Marine Science Institute, will assist future conservation and development decisions in the Kimberley-Browse Basin region stretching from the southern end of 80 Mile Beach south of Broome, to the WA-NT border and 200nm out to sea.

WASMI chief executive Steve Blake said decisions about the level of acceptable infrastructure investment in the region could not be made without informed scientific knowledge.

"The aim is to show the gaps in knowledge of the marine science of the region – its oceanography, biodiversity, fisheries, ecology and human usage, as well as how the area was likely to be affected by climate change and once we



SCIENCE: Research will attempt to unlock some secrets.

know where the gaps are, we know which research and studies to prioritise," Dr Blake said.

"To date, while there have been some individual studies in parts of the region, there has been no collective approach to gathering the necessary baseline and contextual

information for the marine and coastal areas."

Offshore oil and gas projects in the Browse Basin face strong resistance from environmentalists. WASMI intends to provide a marine science case and a supporting business case by August 2008.