

Call for caution on Kimberley plan

CHRIS JOHNSON
CANBERRA

Parliamentary secretary Gary Gray insists only the best science and consultation will deliver a plan for the Kimberley, but water and agriculture will not be the only factors he will consider in heading up the Government's new Office of Northern Australia.

The member for Brand, a former mining company executive, holds the executive authority to direct what initiatives will be pursued in regards to the Top End, with the Northern Land and Water Taskforce having been transferred this week from the Environment Department to his stewardship.

But while the new membership and terms of the reference for the task force remain undecided, Mr Gray is adamant he has an open mind about potential projects for the north.

"My view is we need to get the best science and consultation in place to guide our view. There are many possibilities for water use and resource

use," he said. "There's the possibility of an LNG hub going in the Kimberley coast at some time.

"There are significant resources in the north of Australia — hydrocarbons, other minerals, agricultural possibilities and tourism possibilities. And there are significant environmental considerations, but I'm not about to take a position on these matters yet."

He said the task force would have the autonomy to make recommendations independently of Government.

But Greens Senator Rachel Siewert called for caution in the approach to the Kimberley.

"We shouldn't be rushing ahead with development until we have done the proper planning and research and put in place protection for precious and fragile environments," Senator Siewert said.

"The Kimberley is part of the last great savannah in the world and its coast is one of the most magnificent on

the planet. I have no doubt of its World Heritage value.

"We are in danger of rushing headlong into developing the north without heeding the lessons of the past. We need to carefully consider what natural resources are up there, the indigenous owners and other, environmental implications."



Gary Gray