

Kimberley resort faces green appeal

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Opponents of a luxury tourist resort being built in a pristine, remote corner of the East Kimberley are fighting to have the development assessed by the Environmental Protection Authority after it indicated it did not intend to measure the environmental impact of the development.

The resort, comprising 20 "eco-cabins", a restaurant, shop, pool and staff accommodation, is being built at the mouth of the Berkley River, 120km north of Wyndham.

The project has the financial backing of multi-millionaire Kimberley publican Martin Peirson-Jones, who is sub-leasing land from the Jiamiddie Aboriginal Corporation which was granted a free 50-year lease by the Department of Indigenous Affairs in 2003.

Save the Kimberley spokesman Hugh Brown said yesterday the development would permanently destroy

the wilderness value of the region and restrict access for other tourism operators. He said its impact must be assessed.

But the EPA determination says less than one hectare will be cleared for the development and its scale and impacts can be successfully managed.

Opponents have until September 15 to lodge an appeal.

Mr Brown said the EPA had set an alarming precedent for future developments in the region by failing to subject the resort to proper environmental scrutiny and an immediate appeal would be lodged.

"You get one rich businessman who goes in and does a deal with one Aboriginal group and it sets a precedent for how other things are going to be done in these wilderness areas," he said.

A Jiamiddie spokesperson was relieved by the EPA decision, saying the remaining hurdles were obtaining Aboriginal heritage clearance

through the Kimberley Land Council and final approval from the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

Both were expected next month and once given, building and site works would start early next year.

The spokesperson refused to discuss details of Jiamiddie's partnership with Mr Peirson-Jones, saying only that they had struck a "reasonable deal". According to the Jiamiddie group, the development would be environmentally friendly and opponents should worry about other things ruining the region such as resource and gas projects.

Shadow environment minister Steve Thomas said there was plenty of scope for eco-tourism development in the Kimberley and the EPA had clearly found the environmental impact of the venture would be so small that it was not worth investigating.

Environment Minister David Templeman declined to comment pending an appeal.