

BROOME ADVERTISER, Thursday, October 23, 2008

Call for science to catch up

By **BIANCA THAIR**

RESEARCH into the Kimberley marine environment needs an urgent injection of \$110 million to bring knowledge up to the level required for decisions to be made about LNG processing and other pressing issues, according to a report released last week.

The report, titled "A turning of the tide: science for decisions in the Kimberley-Browse marine region", was commissioned by the WA Marine Science Institution.

It said the funding was needed across the next seven years and should come from the main stakeholders – State and Federal Government and the oil and gas industry.

Authored by Notre Dame University Professor Mike Wood and marine environmental consultant Des Mills, the report said further scientific research was needed to not only preserve the Kimberley coast for future generations, but also to aid the public and private sectors and indigenous decision-makers.

WAMSI chairman Peter Rogers said scientific information needed to be the lifeblood of the region and

there was much still to be learnt about the marine wilderness.

"The absence of regional marine and coastal research could ultimately be to the detriment of the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of the region," he said.

Dr Rogers said although some research had been done in the past, little was understood about the entirety of the region including the extensive coral reef systems and sponge platforms and their uniqueness to the Kimberley.

Dr Rogers said funding provided would help fuel a number of initiatives including establishing a baseline understanding of the natural and socio-economic assets in the Kimberley, managing a marine region around the proposed LNG hub site and world or national heritage listing of the State's coastal waters.

The report has been sent to various State and Federal Government figures for consideration.

Premier Colin Barnett said although he had not yet viewed the report, the pre-election promise of the Liberal Party was to commit to

scientific work in the Kimberley.

"Clearly it is a vast area and a vast area of ocean ... so there will be a big scientific effort into the Kimberley," he said. "We are conscious of issues that have been raised such as breeding grounds and the migratory patterns of whales ... we are talking about a very sophisticated natural resource industry."

Gary Scott from Environs Kimberley said he encouraged both Federal and State Governments to take the report seriously.

"We hope more money can go into research and managing biodiversity threats along the Kimberley coast ... although this is a lot of money it is necessary to establish baseline data for future decisions," he said.

A spokesman for Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said Mr Garrett welcomed the report as another contribution to the discussion focusing on the need for careful planning of future developments along the Kimberley coast.