

Minister's Woodside link too open to abuse: Ripper

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Colin Barnett should remove Environment Minister Donna Faragher from the portfolio because her husband's job with Woodside meant there was plenty of potential for a conflict of interest to arise on an array of issues, the Opposition said yesterday.

Opposition Leader Eric Ripper labelled the Premier's decision to appoint her to the environment portfolio unwise, saying a Cabinet reshuffle to change her portfolio responsibilities would be the easiest way to resolve the issue.

He said it was not good enough that Mr Barnett had only precluded Mrs Faragher from dealing with issues related specifically to Woodside.

Mrs Faragher has a conflict of interest which bars her from dealing with issues surrounding the choice of the site for the LNG hub in the Kimberley — arguably one of the biggest environmental issues facing WA — because her husband, Scott Faragher, works for gas giant Woodside.

Mr Ripper called yesterday on Mr Barnett to outline which issues Mrs Faragher would be involved in making decisions on and which she would be excluded from.

"I don't have any questions about Mrs Faragher's personal integrity but her appointment as Environment Minister does look unwise because there is so much potential for conflict of interest," Mr Ripper said.

"Such is Woodside's presence in the economy that there will be a lot of issues involving Woodside's partners, competitors and customers that she can't deal with; therefore there will be a large slab of environmental work and perhaps Cabinet work that she won't be able to participate in.

"The easiest resolution would be a small Cabinet reshuffle early on . . . otherwise the appointment will eventually become untenable." Mr Barnett rejected Mr Ripper's call for Mrs Faragher to be removed from the portfolio.

He said that when he offered Mrs Faragher the environment portfolio she told him immediately that her husband worked at Woodside but together they decided she could still do the job. Mr Barnett said Woodside and the Government took steps to overcome any perceived conflict of interest. Woodside had transferred Mr Faragher to ensure there was no potential for him to work on any matter related to WA.

Mr Barnett said the Government, on the advice of a solicitor, had put in place a procedure for Planning Minister John Day to deal with any issues related to Woodside and the environment in Mrs Faragher's place.

"I do not see any conflict at all, in fact what we've done is recognise there could be a conflict of interest and we have taken measures to ensure that that will never ever arise," Mr Barnett said.

Mrs Faragher said she had been completely open and transparent in relation to her husband's work.

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