



Save the Nature of the Kimberley

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Media Release

Monday 7 May 2007

Heffernan pre-empting outcomes of Northern Taskforce

Environs Kimberley (EK) today accused Senator Bill Heffernan, Chair of the Prime Minister's Northern Taskforce, of pre-empting the outcomes of the Taskforce before it has even been properly established.

"Senator Heffernan told last week's *Kimberley Economic Forum* in Broome that it is time to turn Northern Australia into a major food exporting region to supply Asia's burgeoning and water-poor population", said EK's Freshwater Campaigner Dr Gary Scott. "He even said that it would be negligent not to develop a 'frontier' if its out there. However, EK believes it would be a far more gross act of negligence if the Heffernan Taskforce began its work based on the premise that large-scale agricultural development in the north is both desirable and inevitable".

"Large-scale land clearing and water extraction for agricultural activities is not compatible with protection of the globally significant environmental and cultural values of northern Australia. This mode of development has failed in the past and is likely to fail again, particularly in an era of rapid and dangerous climate change".

"Instead, small-scale agricultural ventures that use water resources wisely, ecological and cultural tourism development and conservation and land management activities can provide feasible and sustainable livelihoods for people in the north. Senator Heffernan's Taskforce should look at ways to support these more appropriate economic activities, rather than maintain a narrow focus on large-scale development projects".

"Meanwhile, EK welcomes Senator Heffernan's commitment that the Taskforce will be led by science, provided it is the science of ecology that underpins its investigations. The prospects for large-scale irrigation schemes must be assessed in the light of the best ecological research available", concluded Dr Scott.

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