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Government oil spill inquiry should not delay immediate action on marine protection

Conservation groups have warned the Commonwealth Government today not to use the public inquiry into one of Australia's worst oil spills as a smokescreen to not take strong action on marine protection in the Kimberley, one of the world's most pristine marine environments.

Conservation Council of WA Director Piers Verstegen said conservation groups were afraid that the inquiry would simply become focused on tinkering around the edges – improving some industry regulations and practice - rather than delivering on major marine protection.

“The community has a right to know what went wrong and why the response from both industry and government was a debacle.

“But the simple fact is we don't need to wait for the results of the inquiry to know that the oil and gas industry is highly risky and it is not appropriate to be located in the pristine Kimberley marine environment,” he said.

Environs Kimberley Director Martin Pritchard said less than one per cent of the Kimberley marine region was protected and this needed to be urgently fixed.

“The only way to protect Kimberley's marine life is by establishing large marine sanctuaries. These would be a safe haven for marine life to feed and breed, free from industrial development,” he said.

“It is quite possible that this inquiry will enable the Government to appear as if it is ticking all the boxes in the public eye while avoiding the real solution to protect this special marine environment.”

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