



MEDIA RELEASE- Monday 8 February 2010

Northern Australia Taskforce recognises Kimberley environment must be protected

Western Australian Environment groups including the Conservation Council of WA, The Wilderness Society and Environs Kimberley today welcomed key elements of the new policy blueprint released by the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce.

In particular the groups welcomed the recognition of the outstanding ecological values of the Kimberley, and the need to ensure that the environmental damage caused through inappropriate development in Southern Australia is not repeated in the North.

The environment groups also welcomed comments on the report from Gary Gray, Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia who was quoted today in *The West Australian* saying that "governments had to ensure the region's economic potential did not put a risk its unique natural and cultural heritage".

The groups strongly supported proposals to significantly increase protected areas in recognition of the globally significant conservation values of the Kimberley, and restated their strong opposition to inappropriate industrial development and any new dams in the region.

Piers Verstegen, Director Conservation Council of WA said "The future of the Kimberley lies in protecting and promoting its spectacular natural and cultural values."

"The environmental values of the Kimberley are of equal significance to the Amazon rainforest, so we need to urgently put in place a comprehensive plan to ensure it is protected from short-term unsustainable developments such as LNG processing and new dams."

Wilderness Society spokesperson Joshua Coates said: "Inappropriate industrial developments such as the massive LNG processing facility proposed for the Kimberley whale coast will have a devastating impact on our world class environmental and tourism assets if allowed to proceed."

The Northern Australia Land and Water Science Review released with the report states that "Much of northern Australia's tourism and recreation is based on the natural environment. Tourism is expected to increase in the north and relies on conserving and maintaining natural river flows."

Environs Kimberley Director, Martin Pritchard said, Environs Kimberley and Traditional Owners successfully stopped the damming of the Fitzroy River for a 200,000 hectare cotton project in the '90's because it was unsustainable. This report shows that we must learn from the mistakes of the south like the Murray Darling Basin and that large scale clearing and water extraction is not appropriate for the north."

"We hope the WA Premier and the Prime Minister make use of this report and help us protect the Kimberley environment by implementing large conservation areas and supporting emerging economies like managing carbon and biodiversity for credit and employing Traditional Owners to look after country."

For further comment, contact:

Peter Robertson, The Wilderness Society WA 0409 089 020

Martin Pritchard, Environs Kimberley 0427 548 075

Piers Verstegen, Conservation Council of Western Australia – 0411 557 892