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KIMBERLEY COAST FOCUS FOR MAJOR SCIENCE STUDY

The waters and coastline of WA's Kimberley region are the focus of a new study that is the first step in the preparation of an integrated scientific plan for the coast and offshore areas.

The study, commissioned by the WA Marine Science Institution (WAMSI), will assist future conservation and development decisions in the Kimberley-Browse Basin region stretching from the southern end of the 80-Mile Beach, south of Broome, to the WA-Northern Territory border and 200 nautical miles out to sea.

WAMSI, a large partnership involving State and Federal Government agencies, the universities and the private sector, has appointed two consultants to assist with the project. Dr Mike Wood, former Executive Dean at Curtin Business School and Dr Des Mills, an environmental scientist with extensive experience in oceanography, will provide a marine science case and a supporting business case by August 2008. They will also identify major priorities for further scientific work and the resources required.

WAMSI CEO Dr Steve Blake said the study aimed to show the gaps in knowledge of the marine science of the region – its oceanography, biodiversity, fisheries, ecology and human usage, as well as how the area was likely to be affected by climate change.

"The Kimberley-Browse Basin region is one of the world's last great wilderness areas," Dr Blake said. "It is coming under increasing pressure from the resources sector, tourism and conservation, and decisions need to be made about the level of infrastructure investment acceptable in the region. "

"You can't make these decisions wisely without informed scientific knowledge. To date, while there have been some individual studies of parts of the region, there has been no collective approach to gathering the necessary baseline and contextual information for the marine and coastal areas."

"For example, scientists think this region harbours some of the most extensive coral fringing reefs in the world – but we don't know that for a fact."

Dr Blake said that the research would result in the Kimberley coast and offshore areas being better understood, managed and used.

There would also be a Kimberley marine science policy summit in Perth in March attended by leading scientists, industry and Government representatives. The study will also facilitate an understanding of the science needs and to identify gaps in existing research programs.

For more information, please contact:

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