

Gina's water rescue

The West Australian,

Jenne Brammer, Saturday, 25 May 2019,

Iron ore magnate Gina Rinehart could hand over tens of thousands of hectares of pastoral land in the Fitzroy Valley to the State Government so it can develop a national park, as part of a \$285 million plan to supercharge growth in the Kimberly cattle industry and create hundreds of jobs in the region.

But the plan's success hinges on getting a water licence from the Government.

Mrs Rinehart, whose Hancock Agriculture portfolio includes the Fossil Downs, Liveringa and Nerrima pastoral stations in the Kimberley, has initiated talks that could lead to her handing over tens of thousands of hectares of its pastoral land, most from Fossil Downs in the heart of the Fitzroy Valley.

The land would enable the State Government to meet its election commitments of creating a Fitzroy national park.

The plan requires annual access to 325GL of surface water from the Fitzroy River. A CSIRO report released last year revealed 1700GL of surface water could be conservatively taken from the river each year. Annual average discharge from the Fitzroy into the ocean is 6600GL a year.

Under Mrs Rinehart's proposal, water access would focus on off-stream storage that would fill when the river floods. There are no intentions to build dams. Water could be used to grow 21,200ha of high-protein fodder crops, including sorghum, hay and corn.

Pastoralists and Graziers Association president Tony Seabrook said this was a "once-in-a-lifetime proposal" and Mrs Rinehart was not asking the Government to fund any part the development.

"It could be the best thing ever to happen in the Kimberley and Gina Rinehart needs help, rather than bureaucracy and hindrance from Government, to make this happen," Mr Seabrook said.