Aussie to oversee new Orleans

By Rosslyn Beeby
Science and Environment Reporter

In the aftermath of September 11, Professor Ed Blakely helped to co-ordinate recovery efforts and re-plan affected areas of New York City.

Now, the University of Sydney’s professor of urban planning has been hand-picked to take on the challenge of rebuilding New Orleans after the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina.

“There is no bigger job in urban planning in the world,” he said yesterday.

The offer to lead a five-person team to coordinate all federal and local bodies involved in the reconstruction, was made by the city’s mayor, Ray Nagin, in New Orleans last week. “We think he’s the best in the world to help us through this recovery,” Mr Nagin said.

**VISION:**

Professor Ed Blakely aims to build a new economy for New Orleans, not just restore the old tourism economy.

Professor Blakely, appointed by former NSW premier Bob Carr to head an expert panel developing a 30-year plan for Sydney’s future, believes “human intelligence and creativity” are the key ingredients in urban planning – not segregation of land uses.

“We’ll be aiming to build a new economy for New Orleans, not put the city back in a way that restores the old tourism economy,” Professor Blakely said.

“We’ll make 50 promises to the people of New Orleans that we will commit to delivering in the first year. If you don’t go in hard on a project like this, you don’t finish hard.”

His priorities include diversifying the city’s economy to make it a trade hub exporting technology to “new middle-class markets in South America”, developing a modern settlement plan and improving security by tackling crime at the community level.

“There are 200 murders every year, most of them drug related and you can’t just arrest your way out of a situation like that. You’ve got to get the community involved.”

Although he begins work in New Orleans in just over three weeks, Professor Blakely will continue to teach at the University of Sydney.

“I’m an Australian now, and this is home,” he said.