

Japanese firm to develop major WA gas field

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Leading Japanese energy company Inpex Holdings says it plans to invest up to \$6 billion (\$A8.26 billion) to produce natural gas off the west coast of Australia from 2012.

Inpex aims to start producing the gas after seeking an environmental examination by the Australian government this month, a company spokesman said.

The project is expected to produce about five to six million tonnes a year, or about 10 per cent of Japan's total annual gas imports, the spokesman said.

Inpex, which was created on April 3 through the merger of Inpex Corp and Teikoku Oil, aims to pump the gas from the Ixis field about 200 kilometres off the west coast of Australia.

The move comes amid intensifying competition between Japan and other countries, particularly China, to secure stable gas supplies.

Japan, one of the world's top energy importers, is embroiled in a territorial dispute with Beijing over potentially lucrative gas fields in a part of the East China Sea.

- AFP