

Fears gas plant to get go-ahead

By PHILLIPA PRIOR

KIMBERLEY indigenous tour operators have voiced alarm at what they say is a continuing push by Woodside to build a giant gas processing plant on the Dampier Peninsula despite their repeated objections.

Last month, the WA Office of State Development's Brendon Hammond made an unscheduled visit to several peninsula communities to renew discussions about the plant.

Premier Alan Carpenter last week told State Parliament it was dialogue, not a demand.

"I have asked Brendan Hammond ... to enter into dialogue with the people of the region. If the Aboriginal people in the west Kimberley do not want to host an onshore processing facility, none will occur," he said.

"The development of the offshore LNG resources will nonetheless proceed, and the full range of potential opportunities arising from such developments

may be lost to those communities."

Kathleen Cox, representing a group of Dampier Peninsula tourism operators known as ARDI, said developing an onshore processing plant risked indigenous operators losing their livelihood.

"We went through a process last year with Woodside in regards to that gas plant and we said that we don't want it," Ms Cox said.

"We promote that what we have to offer to the visitors is exclusiveness, remoteness, the pristine, an untouched environment in the wilderness. We won't be able to do that if there's a big gas plant there."

Ms Cox said Woodside was in the process of putting together a site selection brief to discuss 40 possible sites for the plant in the West Kimberley.

When approached by the *Broome Advertiser*, Woodside would only say the company had "not yet made a decision about where it might build an LNG processing plant to support the devel-

opment of the Browse gas fields".

But Munget Aboriginal Corporation chairman Lenny O'Meara said he had been told during the visit to his community that exploration couldn't be stopped.

He said his community feared it could now face the prospect of compulsory land acquisition.

"(Mr Hammond) said that he wasn't up here for Woodside but said that we as the people who are living in the area where Woodside would like to locate their plant, we should start negotiations for compensation," Mr O'Meara said.

Ms Cox said the uncertainty was causing a great deal of anguish to indigenous communities in the region. "We just want to tell them, 'what part of no don't you understand?'" she said.

"In my opinion they've already got their minds made up on where they want to go ... I still didn't get the whole truth. All we're asking is for transparency from Woodside and transparency from the Carpenter Government as well."