

GOVERNMENT MEDIA MONITORING UNIT

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SUBJECT: DOUGLAS – CONCERN ABOUT THE KIMBERLEY COASTLINE

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GRAHAM MABURY

It's a great pleasure to welcome to Nightline crocodile expert and film-maker, Malcolm Douglas. He's got a concern about Australia's Kimberley coastline, and we're going to talk to him about that now...(greetings not transcribed)...

We are here to talk about the coast, though, mate, because you've got a concern for the coast, what's that?

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

As you know, I've been making films on the Kimberley coast for the last 40 years, and it is really one of the last great wilderness areas in the world. I mean, I know it's a cliché, and we all say that, but that area that sticks out towards Asia, you've got Broome at the bottom of it, Wyndham on the other side, and it really is one of the most magnificent wilderness areas in the world. And just in the last month or two, there's been some alarming reports about up to seven multi-national companies wanting to build huge gas plants on this coast.

Now I don't think anyone wants to stop the economic boom, nobody wants to stop this, we just want these people to put their cards on the table, tell us exactly what they want to do and perhaps there is alternatives to doing something like putting a huge natural gas plant... liquefied natural gas plant on the coast with up to 3,000 workers on the pristine Kimberley coast, or on the outlying islands, for say 20 or 30 years, for just economic gain.

The one that we're really worried about is the company Inpex, which was going to build a huge plant, so we've been told, and it's all very secretive at the moment, on the Maret Islands, that is west of Bigey* Island, right up the top of the north-west Kimberley coast.

What we want these people to do is to sit down with us, tell us what they're going to do,

come out with proper environmental studies and make us aware, because we are not very trustful of these companies, we're not very trustful of the state or federal government - although I believe a lot of it is out of the State Government hand because it is outside the, you know, three mile nautical limit.

But we believe that once the public get a hold on this, this is going to be a bigger issue than the Franklin River was in the '70s in the mainland of Australia, and particularly Tasmania.

I mean, I keep a pretty low profile, as you know, I just work up here with the crocodiles and setting up a wilderness... wildlife wilderness park, breeding endangered species. I've just delivered a whole lot of new films to the TV station. I get great enjoyment about going into the Kimberley, into the bush and enjoying it.

But I sort of ... everyone's come to me in the last week or so and said look, we're going to launch this huge campaign...

GRAHAM MABURY

...well you're going to be doing some ads, what are the ads going to be saying?

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

The ads are just going to be... say things like the Kimberley is one of the great wilderness areas in the world, the Kimberley has not had any recorded extinctions of animals in the last, you know, in recent times.

There's going to be these huge natural gas plants going onto the coast. There are alternatives for these companies. We want... we would like these companies to sit down... see, this gas, going back a bit for the people who that are not aware of what it is, it's huge gas under the ocean 400 nautical miles in what they call the Browse Basin, way out off the north-west coast. They want to put it in massive pipes and bring it ashore, hold it in massive tanks and then send it by tankers all overseas. Now we are suggesting that to do this is environmental vandalism on the Kimberley coast. Perhaps they could take it south. Perhaps they could go down on the Burrup Peninsula, all the infrastructure is there.

Just take one example...

GRAHAM MABURY

...yep...

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

... just take Inpex. This Japanese company, who are very new to this thing, they want to get onto Maret Island, right? Right up there on the west coast.

GRAHAM MABURY

Yep.

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

I got some figures just emailed to me just minutes ago. Total shipping and tug movements around the Maret Islands is over 5,000 movements per year, that is of great big LNG carriers, tug boats, barges and everything.

Now that area up there is one of the main breeding grounds - if you want to get emotional about it - one of the main breeding grounds for the humpback whale. Thirteen thousand whales migrate from the... Antarctica every year, go up there and have their young.

We have the largest population left of dugong in the Kimberleys. We have the largest populations of turtles and the dugong. Can you imagine what's going to happen to those populations with 5,000 tugs and carriers and ... and barges? We could go on. We could go on talking about this.

But one of our big problems is we still don't have enough facts and figures, so we keep... when we say we keep, we're going to go to these companies now and we're going to say to them: Just ease off for a bit. Do some proper environmental studies on this area. Come up and talk to us, tell us what you're going to do. They might have the strength to persuade us to change our opinions. I don't think we will.

GRAHAM MABURY

Mind you, shouldn't the Government be doing that? Shouldn't it be the Government saying to them: Listen, hold off until we give you environmental... until the environmental protection people clear this thing?

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

Yes, but governments are only interested in economic development. This one, the impact that are putting on... going onto Maret Island – which is the one they're really pushing ahead. I mean, you've got Shell, you've got Woodside, you've got all of these companies. But they have a licence already to go up there to drill. They're already up there working, right?

GRAHAM MABURY

Yep.

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

Already up there working. This is backed by the Japanese Government. They are so desperate for this gas, they are really pushing it ahead. And can you imagine the royalties that go to the Commonwealth Government. That's what we're saying. We can't stop it, we

just want them to think of alternatives. Perhaps getting... going... taking it south.

GRAHAM MABURY

And one of the things you do say, or you're quoted as saying – and I'd love you to say it on my program – is that if you go forward a couple of hundred years, then wilderness will be more important than oil and gas.

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

Well this is my own personal opinion. See, I've been – in a very low-key way, in the last three or four years – I've just been getting people together, raising some money. We want part of that west Kimberley to become World Heritage area. It's not a perfect answer, but at least it is a way to recognise how important it is, right?

Now, go back to what you just said. These economic booms and busts come along, 20 or 30 years and then they're gone. As... not talking about my generation, I mean, I'm heading towards 70 now, would you believe? I'm 66, still out there making films. But 50 years, 100 years, 200 years from now, these wilderness areas, I believe, are going to be far more important to countries like Australia than all the mining and all the economic booms, all this natural gas, because the whole of the world population will be craving to see wilderness, to go and... just to go into a wilderness area.

What we want them to do is to just keep the Kimberleys as it is, go in there by boat, perhaps go ashore and walk around, but not these great big industrial development. What they're also talking about, once they get these gas plants there, is developing huge industrial refineries and everything for bauxite, right up on the Mitchell Plateau. I mean, this is just terrible. If we could just hang on to this country.

Take Fraser Island for example, though, that's a classic example on the east coast, right?

GRAHAM MABURY

Yeah.

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

Now 50 years ago they wanted to sand mine it, they wanted to chop the rest of the trees down. I mean, Bjelke-Petersen behind this. You go over to Noosa now, even the most radical right-wing developer would be... we protect Fraser Island because it is bringing in so much money to that area. Whether they like Fraser Island, whether they're interested in saving the rainforest, whether they're interested in the fact that it is the largest sand island in the world, that's irrelevant to these guys. The fact is that it's bringing in money. That economic boom is greater than all the sand mining, all the timber... all the timber cutting. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of people every year go to Fraser Island now and it's protected because people want to see it, because it's a World Heritage Area, and we want to do the same in the Kimberley.

GRAHAM MABURY

Malcolm Douglas, good to talk to you, thanks for your time.

MALCOLM DOUGLAS

Pleasure, mate.

Ends...

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