

Lobby group CHEAK says region's wilderness and tourism industry is threatened by major resources projects

# Bid to keep boom out of the Kimberley

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While business and the State Government are busy praising the jobs, salaries and royalties flowing from WA's resources development, a new lobby group is spending big to try to keep the boom out of the Kimberley.

Cultural Heritage and Environmental Advocacy for the Kimberley (CHEAK) has launched a costly media campaign, claiming the region's wilderness areas and tourism industry would suffer heavily under multi-billion-dollar gas and mining projects — a reality that is going largely untold in the region's communities.

The group has spent up to \$1.5 million on a media campaign, including TV advertisements, that will be screened in WA on the WIN network in the coming weeks — starting yesterday — and feature renowned documentary-maker Malcolm Douglas and music by Xavier Rudd.

Mr Douglas, a CHEAK spokesman, said one of the world's most precious natural assets was at stake. "The worst case scenario is they're going to stuff up that pristine wilderness area up there. Why try and screw it up, possibly, with all these industrial plants," he said.

Two LNG proposals — a \$10 billion project from Woodside and an \$US8 billion project from Japan's Inpex — were in planning for the Browse Basin off the Kimberley coast, and CHEAK warned that before long resource giants would start invading in a big way.

"Pretty much most of the coastal strip between Derby and Cape Londonderry has been pegged with exploration tenements. About 70 per cent of

that has happened over the last 18 months," CHEAK spokesman Hugh Brown said.

Two bauxite mines had been earmarked, and two port facilities and an alumina smelter were also planned.

Mr Brown said while the projects would threaten the Kimberley's pristine wilderness, they could also slash the region's tourism sector — which, according to Tourism WA, brings the region about \$262 million a year.

Major projects would see resource companies monopolise even more flights and accommodation from tourists — a point echoed by Kimberley Wildlife Expeditions owner Jen Bird.

"The infrastructure's not here to cope with both industries particularly well," he said. "I think a lot of tourists have great difficulty getting up here and finding accommodation and services because mining do take up a lot."

Mr Brown agreed the State would reap massive royalties from resource projects but said suggestions of a jobs explosion were based on myth. He estimated that a \$US8 billion project would only produce 300 ongoing jobs after a peak construction phase of 2000 to 3000 jobs. And high salaries offered by the projects would funnel staff into the resources sector, causing community service levels to drop.

While the Broome Chamber of Commerce and Industry was optimistic about the benefits of big resource agreements, it agreed with CHEAK's stance that community consultation was crucial and had so far been sub-standard.

"To date, there have been too few opportunities for all interested

parties to meet with Government and the industry," president Patrick Imbert said. "The chamber urges Government to lead an all-inclusive community consultation process that is overdue but not too late."

A spokesman for Industry Minister Francis Logan said proposals received by the WA Government went through a "rigorous approvals process" involving the Environmental Protection Authority and consultation with the local community. But Mr Brown said open forums had to come as soon as firms and Government began discussion. By the time proposals hit the approvals process, extensive planning had occurred and the company money already invested put pressure on the Government to approve projects.

"We're happy for development — it's just got to be managed properly, and with the environment and some of the economic issues locally considered. And people to be brought along in the process," Mr Brown said.

A spokeswoman for Woodside said the Browse LNG project was only in early planning — a site had not been determined and a community reference group had been meeting since the beginning of the year. "We very much value the community's view and will take this into consideration as we get closer to finalising out development plans," she said.

Mr Logan's spokesman said development in the Kimberley was inevitable but the Government would ensure it occurred in a "sustainable and sympathetic way". "It will be developed — if not by this Government, by a government in the future," he said.



**Under threat:** The Kimberley's breathtaking natural beauty is a major attraction.



**Making a stance:** Documentary-maker Malcolm Douglas is fronting a Cultural Heritage and Environmental Advocacy for the Kimberley campaign to protect the region from mining.