

Aborigines invite LNG players to table

Victoria Laurie

ABORIGINES have signalled the go-ahead for a liquefied natural gas industry to be established off the Kimberley coast by inviting industry players to work with them in building an onshore gas facility.

In a major split from environmental groups that oppose gas industry development on the pristine coast, the Kimberley Land Council has flagged its intention to work with "suitably qualified LNG operators, LNG infrastructure providers and financiers" in paid advertisements to be placed in major newspapers this week.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said traditional owners were ready to discuss plans with several oil and gas companies holding big offshore reserves in the Browse Basin.

"We're asking them to come and talk to us because we're interested in finding out what

opportunities exist for indigenous people and their land," Mr Bergmann said.

The KLC is negotiating with Japanese-owned gas provider Inpex over its proposal to build an LNG processing plant on the tiny Maret Islands, northeast of Broome.

Last weekend, a group of conservationists and tour boat operators staged a demonstration at the foot of Inpex's test drilling rig located offshore as a protest against siting an LNG plant on the Kimberley coast.

Mr Bergmann said indigenous people were not part of the demonstration. He said the Bardi Jawi traditional owners of the Dampier Peninsula, a coastal area also mooted as a possible LNG plant site, last week passed a resolution to start discussions with interested companies over the siting of an LNG facility.

"We have good environmental partnerships and we are doing joint projects with groups like the WWF but at times we won't see eye to eye on certain issues," Mr Bergmann said.

"This is a quantum leap for the KLC but it doesn't mean an automatic yes to all development. The land is a resource provided for us, the ocean is a bit like a supermarket. All we are doing is changing the way in which the land can continue to provide for our wellbeing."

His comments echo those of indigenous leader Noel Pearson, who has argued that advocates for preserving wilderness at Cape York are standing in the way of Aboriginal economic development. Mr Bergmann said traditional owners held identical aspirations to Cape York Aborigines in seeking a balance between exploiting and protecting their traditional lands.