



Woodside considers Pluto plant for Browse Basin

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by Mark Beyer and Andrew Hobbs

Woodside Petroleum managing director Don Voelte has raised the possibility that development of its giant Browse Basin gas field could be linked to its planned Pluto LNG plant or the existing North West Shelf Venture's LNG plant, both on the Burrup Peninsula.

The Pluto and Browse projects have hitherto been considered separate opportunities and the possibility of them being linked represents a major shift in thinking.

Speaking at a conference in Sydney, Mr Voelte confirmed that Woodside was nearing a final investment decision on its Pluto project, which involves developing the Pluto gas field and building an LNG plant on the Burrup peninsula.

The cost of the project has been estimated to be about \$10 billion.

He said Woodside was evaluating several follow-up opportunities, which include developing the Browse gas fields off the Kimberley coast, the Sunrise gas project in the Timor Sea or building a second Pluto LNG train.

Mr Voelte emphasised that the Pluto LNG plant would be able to process gas from a variety of offshore fields, owned by Woodside and other producers.

This counters the industry argument that the Pluto gas field is not big enough to support a stand-alone LNG plant.

Mr Voelte also said Woodside was evaluating four development options for processing gas from the Browse site - they being an expansion of the Darwin plant, pumping the gas to the Burrup plant, or the construction of a new plant on either the coast or the reef.

Despite the 900 km distance from the Burrup and North West Shelf LNG plants to the Browse site, Mr Voelte said the aggregation could provide capital savings and increase domestic gas development while minimising the need for infrastructure development in the area.

However, such a concept would require co-operation from NWS owners, community members and environmental and government stakeholders.

Whatever the end decision, the company also aimed to commence the environmental approval process for full field development during the 2007 calendar year.

Meanwhile, Mr Voelte also highlighted industry talk of a plan to develop a gas-to-liquids plant at the Chevron-controlled Wheatstone gas field, located 85km north of the company's Barrow Island oil field.

According to the company webpage, Chevron and its Sasol Chevron subsidiary are undertaking a feasibility study for the site, as well as planning to drill two wells in 2007 after the first was drilled in 2004.