

Woodside set to sidestep green protests

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WOODSIDE is considering piping gas from its Browse Basin reservoirs to be processed on the Burrup Peninsula.

The move would avoid a clash with conservationists over the possible destruction of fragile Kimberley ecosystems.

Chief executive Don Voelte told the UBS energy and utilities conference in Sydney yesterday that the company was considering "at least four" development concepts for the Browse Basin, about 400km north of Broome.

He said that although Browse gas was more than 900km from the Burrup, aggregation through the proposed Pluto LNG plant on the peninsula could provide capital savings and minimise the need for infrastructure development in the Browse area, reducing environmental or cultural sensitivities and increasing and accelerating domestic gas development.

Woodside's board is expected to make a final investment decision in August on its 100 per cent owned Pluto development, which could cost up to \$10 billion and be in production by late 2010.

Woodside's Browse LNG development, based on the Torosa, Brecknock and Calliance fields,



is not expected to be producing until around 2014 at the earliest.

Woodside has been promoting Pluto, which it now calls the Burrup LNG Park, as the first open-access LNG terminal in Australia.

It has been actively encouraging owners of other gas reservoirs on the North West Shelf to consider tolling their gas through the Pluto processing facilities planned for the Burrup, near Karratha.

Mr Voelte said one of the concepts for Pluto "involves working with the other owners in the Pluto area to look at taking their gas through the Burrup LNG Park and/or the North West Shelf LNG plant".

Pluto has already aroused concern because the West Australian Government has allocated a site for the onshore processing plant outside the ex-

isting North West Shelf licence, which will result in Woodside having to relocate around 350 Aboriginal petroglyphs.

Yesterday's presentation by Mr Voelte is the first time the company has confirmed that piping gas away from the Kimberley coast is an option.

Earlier this month Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin promoted the idea of piping Browse gas to Darwin, where it could be used to fuel an expansion of the Conoco Phillips Wickham Point LNG plant and as feedstock for downstream industries in the territory.

Other options include sinking a barge containing processing facilities on Scott Reef, having the facilities built on a floating offshore platform, or building an onshore processing plant in the Kimberley.

Conservationists, including WWF Australia CEO Greg Bourne and novelist Tim Winton, have argued that the possibility that the Browse Basin could host several export LNG projects could cause cumulative damage to ecosystems in the most remote part of Australia.