

Gas hub chances slip

By DALE MILLER

THE concept of creating one industrial hub for LNG developments off the Kimberley coast appears under threat following the signing of an agreement involving Japanese resource company Inpex.

A negotiation agreement was signed between the Kimberley Land Council and Inpex last Wednesday on the Maret Islands – about 450km north-east of Broome – and represents a significant step in the Japanese company's plans to build a gas processing plant at the location.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said the real threat was that more than six exploration companies interested in the Kimberley coast would want their own area to develop.

"The very real thing before us now is the possibility of two LNG developments in the Kimberley, one on the Maret Islands and one somewhere else in the Kimberley," he said.

"Ideally it would be far better to have one single hub development in the Kimberley. The land council

doesn't control the outcomes of those things. These things are being controlled by industry.

"Government to some extent has a greater say as to whether that can or can't happen so rather than sit back and not participate we feel that we've got no choice but to deal with those challenges."

Mr Bergmann said there had been no formal engagement between the KLC and State Government representatives on the matter with the council forced to take a lead role in the absence of other leadership.

Negotiations between Inpex and the KLC are expected to be completed within 18 months.

Inpex group affairs manager Sean Kildare said the company was open minded to the idea of sharing the Maret Islands.

"We are aware of everyone's ambitions to co-locate as much as possible any sort of gas-based development in one location. That is possible," he said.

But Cultural, Heritage and Environmental Advocacy for the

Kimberley spokesman Kevin Blatchford said there was not enough space on the islands for an industrial hub and claimed the location was unsuitable for Inpex's proposal.

"We believe Aboriginal people wouldn't be considering giving up the Maret Islands if they weren't in the economic situation they've been forced into by the removal of CDEP," he said.

State Development Minister Eric Ripper said the Government had already stated it preferred a hub model to minimise damage to the environment and heritage values.

He said it was encouraging to see the KLC and Inpex reach agreement on what he described as a "complex matter".

"Direct agreement between traditional owners and the Maret proponents is an essential and distinct part of the overall approval process that includes wider ranging government approvals," he said.



ISLAND HOME: Traditional owner Basil Djanghra and Inpex's Jiro Okada at the Maret Islands