

Pluto plans run out of gas

WA's environmental watchdog has knocked back Woodside Energy's plans to develop its multi-billion dollar Pluto LNG project on the Burrup Peninsula.

The Environmental Protection Authority said the project would require extensive dredging and could cause loss of coral in the Mermaid Sound, near Karratha.

Despite failing to meet the EPA's objectives for the marine environment, Woodside could submit an improved offset package and still gain project approval.

"Provided a substantive offset package is agreed to and stringent conditions recommended are fully implemented, the Pluto LNG development could proceed," EPA deputy chairwoman Andrea Hinwood said.

The EPA found the Pluto proposal would result in 54 per cent of coral next to the proposed export facilities being destroyed when the maximum allowed was 10 per cent.

It also said unacceptable damage would occur, through dredging for new export facilities and the 190km pipeline, within the proposed Dampier Archipelago Marine Park around Conzinc Island.

It recommended a 'dredge impact management plan' to minimise damage in Mermaid Sound and prevent any impact in the proposed marine park.

The EPA suggested the Dampier Port Authority should take a leadership role in managing the cumulative impacts of harbour dredging within its limits.

Dr Hinwood said impact on the marine environment would be greatly reduced if port-related infrastructure was shared.

She said future industrial developments in Mermaid Sound would need to comprehensively justify additional single-user facilities.

A Woodside spokeswoman said the company was "generally satisfied" with the EPA's recommendations.

"The issues that we may need to clarify are fairly technical, there are no broad-scale issues," she said.

Woodside hopes to start production at its wholly-owned gas processing plant by 2010, with an initial capacity of about five to six million tonnes a year.

Agreements have already been reached with two Japanese companies to supply up to 3.75 million tonnes of LNG a year for at least 15 years.

