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AM - Progress won't harm Kimberley coast: Carpenter

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AM - Friday, 24 August , 2007 08:11:00

Reporter: Tony Eastley

TONY EASTLEY: This week *AM* has been looking at the looming clash between the tourism and mining industries in one of Australia's largest and most pristine wilderness areas, the Kimberley.

There are enormous gas and oil reserves off the coast, which are some of the biggest in the world. But the gas needs processing and that means the construction somewhere, of a giant, multi-billion dollar facility.

Should it be in the Kimberley, either offshore or on the land? Or should the gas be piped south or perhaps north for processing?

The Premier of Western Australia, Alan Carpenter, says the Browse Basin project, as it's known, will go ahead. He vows to protect the environment, but admits he can't please everyone when it comes to deciding where the gas should be processed.

I spoke to Mr Carpenter in his offices in Perth.

Premier, welcome along to *AM*. The Browse Basin, it's being touted as an enormous gas reserve and a proposal for a single, perhaps the largest private investment in WA's history. What's at stake in the Kimberley?

ALAN CARPENTER: Well as I said, the Kimberley coast is largely, not entirely, but largely undeveloped. It's a pristine environment up there. So the prospect of a major industrial development on that coastline needs to be addressed sensitively and properly.

TONY EASTLEY: Is it feasible for the LNG (liquefied natural gas) to be pulled out of the ground off the coast and piped to the Pilbara?

ALAN CARPENTER: I believe so, and that is, I believe so and that is an option I think which, look, you ask what the opportunities are? One is to do it completely offshore, out on Scott Reef, which is a very, very long way from the West Australian coast.

I've had people from my office and my departments go out there and do some analysis of that location. I don't favour it. There is some suggestion that you could pipe the gas over to Darwin and be processed over there, but I don't think that is economically attractive to the proponents.

There is the Maret Island option. There is the Dampier Peninsula option. Another real live option - and the companies are looking at it now and it has a lot of attraction - is to pipe the gas all the way down to the Pilbara coast to the existing facilities near Karratha on the Burrup Peninsula.

TONY EASTLEY: I get the distinct impression that you as Premier like the sound of that one?

ALAN CARPENTER: I do. I do like that. But, you know, what I wouldn't want to see is the opportunity lost completely for development on that Kimberley coast if it can be done in a way which, particularly the local Indigenous community, can draw great benefit from.

TONY EASTLEY: *AM* has been told by various tourist operators up there and cattlemen as well, that your government isn't consulting them when it comes to these projects that are on offer.

ALAN CARPENTER: Yeah well Tony, look as you might expect, I take issue with that. I'm the Premier and I know quite a few of those people in the Kimberley personally, and I've got absolutely no intention of dudding them.

And I've had Brendan Hammond, who is a senior official who works directly to the Premier in this State for the Office of Development Approvals Coordination, in the Kimberley for some time, and I'm talking here maybe 12 months.

TONY EASTLEY: Again and again it came up that, "We're not being consulted. We feel like we're stakeholders, yet we're being shut out".

ALAN CARPENTER: Well, you're never going to please everybody. I mean, let's get that going straightaway. Now, if you're talking there about, "they are dirty", if you're talking about the tourism operators, the tourism, the tour operators and tourism operators have made their case quite clearly. They don't want to see any sort of this development on the Kimberley coast.

TONY EASTLEY: Whatever the option, whether it's to bring a pipeline further down the coast, whether it's to process LNG on the Maret Islands, can you guarantee as Premier that the wilderness in those parts which everyone talks of, yourself included, won't be damaged?

ALAN CARPENTER: Well, we've got absolutely no intention of creating a problem or a scenario where the environmental values of that coastline of that region are diminished.

TONY EASTLEY: Is that a guarantee?

ALAN CARPENTER: Well yes. But, but Tony, it is impossible to establish an LNG facility that nobody can see and that doesn't exist. Now what you need to do, if you expect to get State Government approval for these projects, what you need to do is first of all address all of the environmental issues, and we have extremely rigorous environmental requirements in WA.

And the second is that you have to engage the Indigenous community and give them a stake and make sure that they are supportive. Now, it may well be that the final decision will see the gas or a large component percentage of that gas piped down to the Pilbara coast, the existing facilities, and the Kimberley coast bypassed altogether.

But I'm pretty sure that we will get at least one gas processing facility on that Kimberley coast.

TONY EASTLEY: The Premier of Western Australia, Alan Carpenter.

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