

# Kimberley group gathers support to fight LNG plans

By Jennifer Macey

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Before the last election, Tasmanian environmental groups tapped into the national environmental conscience to build opposition to the Tamar Valley pulp mill.

Now a group from Western Australia is travelling the east coast of the mainland to drum up support for its campaign to protect the Kimberley coastline from industrial development.

Plans are afoot to build at least two gas processing plants in the Kimberley, which would take gas drawn from offshore reserves.



With 300,000 tourists visiting the region each year, operators say an LNG processing hub should be built far away from pristine wilderness areas in the Kimberley. (Annabelle Sandes)

The 'Save the Kimberley' group wants only one area developed as a hub for liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and it wants the Kimberley World Heritage-listed.

One of the best ways to get Sydneysiders' attention is to get them on a boat on the Harbour.

Last night a group from Western Australia did just that, to muster support for the campaign against the gas projects.

The most prominent member of the Save the Kimberley group is film-maker and crocodile hunter Malcolm Douglas.

"The Kimberleys is absolutely unique. It's the largest, untouched savanna woodlands left in the world, with no animal extinction," he said.

"It is where all the humpback whales in Western Australia breed, we have some of the most pristine coral reefs, fringing reefs. And they're only just discovering these reefs."

## Environmental 'sacrifice'

Companies such as Woodside, Shell and Total hope to exploit WA's vast offshore gas reserves.

The Japanese company Inpex is already seeking approval for a \$10 billion LNG plant on the remote Maret Islands, 300 kilometres north-east of Derby.

In a statement, Inpex says it is confident the Maret Islands can be developed and operated without significant impact on the region's environmental and social values.

But WWF spokesman Paul Gamblin disagrees.

"These proposals are massive. They require the construction of major ports, major industrial nodes in very sensitive areas," he said.

"We believe that all companies should co-locate their projects, because that is one way where you could minimise some of the impacts and actually share some of the infrastructure.

"You would have one area that would be sacrificed, rather than a proliferation of areas that would be sacrificed to the gas industry."

## **Impact on tourism**

The State Government says it has set up a northern development task force to consult with Kimberley stakeholders about the best site for such a processing hub.

With 300,000 tourists visiting the region each year, tour operators say this hub should be built far away from pristine wilderness areas.

Kimberley Marine Tourism Association president Kevin Blatchford says his group is not anti-development, he just does not want this type of development in the region.

"Put in your mind the Great Barrier Reef, and then someone says to you, 'look, we only want to take a little section, it's just in the middle. We just want to industrialise one little bit of the Great Barrier Reef'," he said.

"We wouldn't even be contemplating that. No one would contemplate that.

"What we're saying is save the Kimberley, and what the nation is starting to get on to now is the Kimberley is just so unique.

"If we're going to save it, we get one chance and that chance is now."