

Garrett snubbed us over coastal development says land council

By Tony Barrass

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THE Kimberley Land Council claims it was kept in the dark over Environment Minister Peter Garrett's plan to use federal laws to speed up and control industrial development on the pristine Kimberley coastline.

Angry KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann told *The Australian*: "We are the major stakeholder in this process, yet the Federal Government has seen fit not to inform us in any shape or form about this major decision affecting the traditional owners of this land."

Mr Bergmann's comments followed Mr Garrett's decision to use the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to examine how federal and state governments could encourage environmentally and culturally sensitive development of massive offshore natural gas deposits in the region.

The study will also examine the benefits of creating a central hub servicing all onshore processing plants, avoiding the ad hoc manner in which the multi-billion-dollar industry has developed on the environmentally sensitive Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara. The Kimberley site should be identified by the end of the year.

Japan's biggest oil producer, Inpex, which wants to build a processing plant on the Maret Islands, was also believed to be upset at the surprise announcement. In a short, terse statement, it said: "Inpex was not consulted prior to the media release, nor was it formally advised of the commonwealth and state governments' position at this time."

Mr Bergmann said the KLC had been pivotal in getting all the traditional owners and environmental and cultural groups together to discuss the issue. Although disappointed they were not informed of the joint-government statement, he was encouraged that both governments "seemed to indicate" they favoured single-hub development.

Mr Garrett said no one wanted piecemeal development in the Kimberley.

"What we have seen is the possibility that there'll be a number of different developments running at the same time, but ending up in different places," he said.

The announcement was welcomed by green groups. Prominent conservationist and film-maker Malcolm Douglas told ABC radio: "This is the best thing that we've heard for some time."