

Mixed reaction as Garrett makes surprise announcement on Kimberley LNG plans

Feds back single hub

By FRIEDA Mc LOUGHLIN

AN HISTORIC agreement between the State and Federal governments to protect the Kimberley from uncoordinated, piecemeal development has been praised by environmentalists but attacked by opponents who say it will lead to the "economic shut-down of the Kimberley".

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett unveiled the new plan via video link at the opening of a World Wildlife Fund workshop in Broome last week.

The three-day workshop aimed to outline ecological "hotspots" and identify scientific research priorities.

Mr Garrett said he didn't believe multiple ports and processing plants along the Kimberley coast were in the national interest and that the announcement of a long-term strategic assessment study was a milestone.

"The first part of this assessment will identify a site for a single common-user LNG hub for the Browse Basin," Mr Garrett said.

"The second part will identify its national and international heritage values."

However, Federal MHR Barry Haase said he agreed with the Chamber of Minerals and Energy



PETER Garrett

which asserted the Browse Basin should be commercialised as quickly as possible given current demand for LNG.

Mr Haase said the surprise announcement by Mr Garrett was a ploy to gain electoral support and a lost opportunity for the Kimberley community.

He dismissed the importance of heritage listing and questioned its precedence over economic gain, citing the Shark Bay world heritage area as a disappointing example.

"The heritage listing of Shark Bay has not caused an influx of tourists; I suggest that, while not wilderness, these gas plants may themselves

become tourist icons in the future," he said.

Mr Haase also contended that having several separate hubs would create "multiple light footprints" which was preferable to "one heavy, broad impact".

Save the Kimberley chairman Peter Tucker said Mr Haase needed to get his head out of the sand and step into the 21st century.

Mr Tucker said the workshop had driven home the fact there was a glaring lacuna in terms of scientific research in the Kimberley and the time frame for research was too short.

"We should be looking more seriously at floating LNG or piping the gas," Mr Tucker said. "This was a bolt from the blue, and a kick in the guts for (Japanese mining company) Inpex."

However, a spokeswoman for Inpex said the company would push ahead with a proposal to process LNG on the Maret Islands and would seek further clarification from the Government.

The Kimberley Land Council welcomed the decision but reiterated that informed consent from traditional owners was crucial to the go ahead.