

Groups protest against Kimberley gas plant

5th March 2008, 20:00 WST

Environment, tourist and Aboriginal groups teamed up today to protest a planned gas processing plant on remote islands off the Kimberley coast with a rally outside the Japanese energy giant Inpex's Perth headquarters.



Chanting "Shame on you Inpex" about 40 protesters also waved placards and urged lunchgoers in the city centre to help them "Save the Kimberley".

Inpex plans to build a Liquid Natural Gas plant on the Maret Islands, about 200km north of Broome, to process gas shipped from its Browse Basin's Ichthys field.

Neil McKenzie, a Yawuru man from Broome, said he and other Kimberley Aboriginal people were concerned about the development.

"It's an environmental hazard for our culture and our people," Mr McKenzie told the crowd.

"It's the last frontier, there is no other place like this. There are animals there that are found in no other place on earth."

The protesters want all development to be concentrated in one area.

The WA and federal governments are currently conducting a strategic assessment of the heritage and environment values of the Kimberley and a preferred location for an industrial hub.

Peter Tucker, from Save the Kimberley, representing some of the region's tourism operators, said Inpex's plant should be located in any future hub.

The WA Conservation Council's Chris Tallentire also said Inpex should drop its "unilateralist" approach and join the process.

Mr McKenzie and Albert Wiggan, from One Arm Point, hand delivered a letter to Inpex managing director Jiro Okada, written in Japanese, outlining the importance of the Marets.

"My people need their land. We need our land in order to create reconciliation with everybody else," Mr Wiggan said.

"But destroying country creates tension. We cannot afford to go down that road. This place is far too important."

A spokeswoman for Inpex confirmed Mr Okada had met with the protesters, but did not know what was said.

She said today's protest would not stop the Maret Islands development, with construction of the LNG plant due to start in 2009.

According to The Wilderness Society, the Kimberley Coast and the Maret Islands are home to turtles, dugong and rare snub-nosed dolphins.

The Marets are the location for turtle nesting beaches and pristine coral reefs.

AAP