



Up front: Kimberley traditional owner Albert Wiggan, from One Arm Point, protests outside the Inpex offices. Picture: Nic Ellis

Islanders deliver protest to energy giant Inpex on Kimberley home

STEPHANIE PAINTER

A vocal group of conservationists and Kimberley community leaders protested outside the Perth office of Japanese energy giant Inpex yesterday over the company's plan to build a \$20 billion liquefied natural gas facility on the remote Maret Islands.

Indigenous leaders Albert Wiggan and Neil McKenzie hand-delivered a letter to Inpex managing director Jiro Okada, informing him of the importance of the islands.

Mr Wiggan said the islands, 400km north-east of Broome, were a sanctuary for wildlife and a vital source of information on marine science.

He was concerned the development might lead to divisions among family groups over money paid for the use of the land.

"If large mining companies are going to put footprints all over the Kimberley we will have restrictions on our cultural ways — and that is insulting," Mr Wiggan said.

"I believe communities will suffer solely, and most dramatically, from the destruction of the land. We identify ourselves with the land and destroying it for future benefit is going to create further conflict between indigenous communities in the Kimberley," he said.

"My people are truly — willingly — wanting development in their land. They want to contribute back to the State's economy by using the land in a sustainable way, such as tourism. Not by endangering our environment through industrial development."

Mr Wiggan said the meeting with Inpex executives went well.

"They are becoming more aware of the development process happening in the Kimberley and they seem to be concerned there hasn't been enough consultation with the people immediately affected," Mr Wiggan said.

Save The Kimberley chairman Peter Tucker said the islands were home to many tribal groups and unique wildlife.

"The Kimberley needs to be preserved for young girls like this," he said, gesturing to a toddler in the crowd.

An Inpex spokeswoman said the company met protest representatives for 40 minutes, but the Maret Islands was still the company's preferred site.

"Everyone has a right to free speech and we encourage this active debate," she said. "Our project is continuing on."