

Traditional owners key to WA gas hub

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The West Australian government has given a "substantial" sum to the Kimberley Land Council to consult traditional owners over a proposed single gas-processing hub in the region, as it hardens efforts to make resource companies share more of the boom with troubled indigenous communities.

WA Treasurer and Minister for State Development Eric Ripper said the government would not yet disclose the amount given to the KLC because it would complicate an already challenging consultative task.

"However, once the site selection process is complete, we will be fully and openly accountable about all the

costs involved in the process," he said.

Mr Ripper confirmed last week that the proposed development of a single, multibillion-dollar onshore liquified natural gas processing hub to serve projects in the huge Browse Basin off Broome would hinge on approval from the region's traditional owners.

"We've said strongly that such

processing won't occur without the informed consent of traditional

owners and without their substantial participation in the economic benefits that flow from such a project," he said.

Mr Ripper was in the Kimberley last week with federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett for meetings over the proposed common-user hub including with the KLC, other traditional landowners, shire representatives and environmental groups.

It was their first visit since the state and federal governments struck an agreement last month to subject the entire region to an environmental assessment with the aim of streamlining the identification of a suitable single site and avoiding the

piecemeal developments that have occurred further south.

Mr Ripper said the funds had been provided to the KLC to consult traditional owners up and down the Kimberley coast about sites that were acceptable or unacceptable and a benefits package.

Some resource companies arguably had done a better job than governments in tackling indigenous

governments in tackling indigenous disadvantage through employment, training and using indigenous businesses. "But what we are trying to do is encourage them, all of them, to respond even more vigorously," he said.

Early this month, Mr Ripper told iron-ore producers the resource boom "provided a historic,

generational opportunity to break the back of indigenous disadvantage".

"Whenever you are talking to us about your needs, we will be talking to you about this issue," he said.

Mr Ripper said it would be challenging to find a site in the Kimberley that met technical, commercial, environmental and heritage requirements. But he was convinced it would be found and would suit all major Browse producers, including Japan's Inpex, which has threatened to move processing to Darwin if it can no longer pursue its preferred site on the Maret Islands off WA.

He denied that the government had decided none of the Browse proponents would operate the common-user facility.

KEY POINTS

- Traditional owners will be asked to help choose a suitable site for a WA gas processing hub.
- Kimberley Land Council has been given unspecified funds to carry out consultations.