

Herd on the Terrace



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Inpex' interest more than a flash in Japan

Spotted entering the office of Deputy Premier and de facto-Resources Minister Eric Ripper on St Georges Terrace last Thursday afternoon: Naoki Kuroda, president of Japanese oil giant Inpex Corp.

Whereas the tight-lipped Inpex organs would only confirm the meeting took place as a casual courtesy call while Mr Kuroda was in town, it has set tongues wagging in WA's oil and gas sector that maybe the Japanese giant is having second thoughts about shifting onshore operations for its \$20 billion Ichthys LNG project to the Northern Territory.

Readers of this august journal will recall that Inpex spat the dummy in February amid growing disillusionment with the WA Government's slow-moving approvals process.

Of course, the fact that Ichthys' proposed onshore location is the environmentally sensitive Maret Island off the Kimberley coast, and that the WA Government favours an integrated industry LNG hub on the Kimberley coastline rather than piecemeal developments like the Ichthys plan, is hardly the foundation for a smooth approvals process.

Anyway, a frustrated Inpex in February packed up its toys and signed a "project facilitation agreement" with the NT Government with a view to setting up its LNG plant in Darwin.

Last week's Ripper visit, however, suggests Inpex retains a soft spot for the State of Excitement.