

WA gas hub plan attacked by Opposition

JOSEPH CATANZARO

A proposal from a State and Federal government task force for a central liquefied natural gas processing hub in the Kimberley region will lose WA billions of investment dollars, senior State and Federal Opposition MPs said yesterday.

State Opposition Leader Troy Buswell and Federal member for Kalgoorlie, Barry Hasse, accused the State Government of making it too difficult for investors to set up shop in WA.

They said delays associated with the WA plan would drive companies to establish lucrative gas processing facilities in Darwin.

The task force proposal was also attacked by environment groups, who warned that an industry-driven timeline for the establishment of a central processing plant in the region would threaten the Kimberly environment.

State Development Minister Eric Ripper and Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett yesterday announced that the Northern Development task force had identified nine potential sites for an LNG hub to service companies interested in extracting LNG from the Browse Basin. The area is said to hold more than a third of Australia's known offshore gas reserves.

Mr Buswell said it was an announcement about nothing. "If the Govern-

ment wants Browse Basin gas to be processed on the Kimberley coastline, they need to start getting serious and provide some certainty and leadership in relation to these projects," Mr Buswell said.

He said Mr Ripper's "dithering" and the State Government's "incompetence" meant companies such as Inpex were considering processing their gas in Darwin. A spokesperson for Inpex was not available to comment.

Mr Hasse said plans for the centralised development showed the State Government had learnt nothing from the Varanus Island gas crisis debacle, where one relatively small incident cut gas supply to WA by 30 per cent.

The Conservation Council of WA, Environs Kimberly and the Wilderness society accused the State Government of bowing to industry pressure and moving too fast. Mr Ripper said Mr Buswell had repeatedly refused to elaborate on what model he favours for LNG processing in the Kimberley. "The process we have established has the strong support of all the stakeholders," he said.

Mr Ripper said the single common user hub model was the "best way to get the gas developed, but also to preserve the wonderful Kimberley environment".

Yesterday's task force report said a shortlist of potential sites was expected by August.