

WA govt has been "stuffing around" on LNG plant

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WA has been "stuffing around" on a proposed LNG project that the NT government has cited as the trigger for an early election, the WA opposition says.

The NT's Labor Chief Minister Paul Henderson said today he had called an early election for August 9 in order to help secure a \$12 billion Japanese liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant for Darwin harbour.

The construction of the LNG plant in Darwin would require the Japanese operator, Inpex, to pipe its gas 900 kilometres from the Ichthys field in the Browse Basin off the Kimberley coast.

Inpex signed a project facilitation agreement with the NT government in February to study the viability of the Darwin operation.

Mr Henderson said he had called the early election to give Inpex "certainty" on the proposals.

WA has also been vying for the project, but the government is considering nine sites for an LNG processing hub in the Kimberley region and a short list is being prepared for release early next month.

Opposition resources and industry spokesman Norman Moore said today the Carpenter government had caused Inpex "significant difficulties and frustration".

"Fundamentally there is no question the WA government has been stuffing around with a site for an LNG plant," Mr Moore said.

"The fact the company is now seriously contemplating going to Darwin, and that they are considering a 900km pipeline as opposed to a 200km pipeline, demonstrates the serious frustration being experienced by the company with the dilly dallying of the state government."

Deputy Premier and State Development Minister Eric Ripper said the NT would never be

able to change WA's positional advantage.

"The Northern Territory is facilitating the possibility of Inpex locating in Darwin, just as WA is facilitating the possibility of Inpex locating in a common user LNG hub in West Kimberley," Mr Ripper said.

"WA has one advantage that the Northern Territory can't change - our state is closer to the gas.

"The commonwealth approval process is likely to take the same amount of time wherever the plant is located."

Mr Moore said several companies, including Woodside Petroleum and Inpex, wanted to pipe their gas to a site of their choosing, rather than the hub proposed by the government.

"There's a lot of unhappiness in the companies about that," he said.

"They see the government setting up a joint-user centre and running the show.

"A decision about a hub and where it should be should have been made much sooner than this.

"I believe that for environmental and political reasons, the government is concerned about naming (the site) before an election."

An election is due in WA by early next year.