

Aboriginal tick for four potential gas hub sites

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The traditional Aboriginal owners of the Kimberley have identified three sites near Broome and one in the far north of the State as options for the construction of a controversial processing hub for natural gas extracted from the massive Browse Basin.

Amid speculation that Inpex has become so frustrated with the process it has decided to move its processing plant to Darwin, the Kimberley Land Council will announce today that Gourdon Bay and James Price Point near Broome and North Head, about 130km north of the tourist town, are acceptable to the 14 regional native title claimants it has consulted.

The Anjo peninsula, 40km from Kalumburu, in the north Kimberley has also been short-listed.

The Carpenter Government effectively handed local Aboriginals a veto power over the onshore processing of Browse gas in March, leaving it up to them to pick a site for the gas hub that was not culturally sensitive.

Many big companies with extensive WA interests are lining up to develop the field, including Woodside, Shell, BP, Chevron, Inpex and Texaco.

The State Government is also considering sites for the gas hub through its Northern Development Taskforce.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said Browse had the potential to be bigger than the North-West Shelf project and capable of generat-

ing \$3 billion to \$6 billion a year in revenue over the next 40 to 100 years.

But he said Aboriginal leaders were determined to strike the best deal for their communities, citing a desire for a "multi-billion dollar" package and hundreds of jobs to transform indigenous life in the Kimberley.

"Paying compensation and community benefits is a small percentage of the potential revenue," Mr Bergmann said. "If it does happen, it could change the face of Aboriginal well-being in the Kimberley."

Mr Bergmann said the four sites were all commercially viable. The KLC was hoping to name its preferred final location by the end of October.

However, he warned the Liberals and Nationals — who did not back the Carpenter Government's move to give Aboriginals a veto — not to axe the KLC role if they formed government.

"This process is well under way and if let run will deliver a timely, commercially viable and equitable outcome for resource companies and the community," Mr Bergmann said.

A Woodside spokesman welcomed the announcement of the four sites but did not indicate a preference.

"The Browse joint venture is focusing on two development options — the Kimberley or constructing a pipeline to deliver gas to the Woodside-operated North-West Shelf venture or Pluto LNG project in Karratha," the spokesman said.

"A decision is expected on the development option by the year's end."