

New doubt over future of Kimberley gas hub

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The future of a liquefied natural gas hub in the Kimberley is in more doubt after the multinational companies which want to develop gas fields refused yesterday to say whether they supported any of the places listed as potential processing plant sites.

The Kimberley Land Council this week announced four sites for the processing hub after eight months of consultation with traditional land owners and will cut the list next month.

Inpex is understood to be about to take its planned \$25 billion LNG project to Darwin after a proposal to process gas from its Ichthys project on Maret Island was effectively rejected by the Federal and State governments when they moved to develop one processing hub in the Kimberley.

Inpex yesterday refused to comment but it is understood the Japanese group decided two months ago to build the onshore facilities for Ichthys at Darwin, despite the extra cost.

The KLC has selected Gourdon Bay and James Price Point near Broome and North Head, about 130km north of the tourist

town, as acceptable to the 14 regional native title claimants. The Anjo peninsula, 40km from Kalumburu in the north Kimberley, has also been short-listed.

The Carpenter Government effectively handed local Aboriginals a veto 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.

However, KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said yesterday he feared a Liberal-Nationals government could want more than one LNG hub or that it could scrap the task force, further delaying projects and frustrating the companies.

"The Liberal Party and the National Party have not shown their hands as to what their thinking is," he said.

Chevron and BP both directed questions to Woodside, as the operator of the seven-partner Browse Basin joint venture.

Woodside has not committed to processing onshore in the Kimberley and could still choose to put a pipeline to processing plants on the Burrup Peninsula

near Karratha, where its \$12 billion Pluto LNG project and the North West Shelf Venture are. A spokesman said the joint venture also was waiting on the task force's short list of sites.

Shell spokeswoman Anita Harben said it backed the concept of a hub rather than a plethora of LNG development sites but it had not made a decision.

Mr Bergmann said he believed industry would also reject any calls to scrap the task force because they would not be able to meet project deadlines if the process was not allowed to be completed. He also believed Inpex was still interested in the Kimberley and he had not been told otherwise.

KLC will meet Woodside senior executives today in what are expected to be high-level talks about benefits packages to Aboriginal groups should development proceed.

Northern Development Taskforce chairwoman Anne Nolan said it expected to release its site evaluation report early next week.