



TRANSCRIPT

Bran Nue Deal

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MATTHEW CARNEY: This is a place very few people visit and most anyone would struggle to find on a map.

PETER TUCKER, "SAVE THE KIMBERLEY": We're talking of coast line that's near on a thousand kilometres long and has over a thousand islands. It has a plethora of bays and estuaries. It has rare species that have just been discovered, it's got species yet to be discovered.

It's a place that's under-studied. They know more about the moon than they do about the Kimberley Coast.

When you turn off and drift, you can hear the whales sing. It reverberates through the vessels and that's very special.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Trouble is the whales aren't the only big deal under sea here. Out over the horizon and below the sea bed there's natural gas - enormous reserves of natural gas - and it's looking for a home on the wild Kimberley coast to turn it into export gold - LNG.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: It would be a complete new greenfield development. So you would need not only plant equipment to process the LNG, to clean the gas, to cool it, but you would need new port facilities, new jetty facilities, roads, airstrips. All of that, power generation, all of that supporting facilities would need to be built.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It looms as one of the nation's largest resource projects. The battle over whether or not it should go ahead is not being fought along conventional lines - far from it.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (excerpt from presentation): This is a project big enough to create some kind of sharing model. We want to make sure that...

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's less about blockades and more about benefits. How can a giant mining development make the smallest environmental dent and the most dramatic improvements Indigenous Australia has seen?

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: It is a huge job but I think we're going to try and do it. And I think that when the heart and spirit's there and the technical support is around us, why can't we do it?

Tonight on "Four Corners" - the virgin coast, gas giants out to plunder the deep and the Indigenous deal-maker looking to make the development pay off like never before.

Cable Beach and camel rides - they're the signature images of Broome, the capital of the Kimberley Coast on Australia's north-west shoulder.

It's further north and far removed from WA's mining belt in the Pilbara but Broome has a boom of its own. The fly-in-fly-out traffic here are tourists, cashed up from

mining work or escaping the cold somewhere else. And unlike many towns in the Pilbara people like living here.

CHRIS MAHER, COUNCILLOR, SHIRE OF BROOME: When I got here in 92 there was five-and-a-half-thousand people living here and there's now 15-and-a-half-thousand people living here. So I'm part of 10,000 new people who came and that 10,000 people I think came here because they wanted to live in Broome. They'd heard about Broome, its sense of community, and wanted to be a part of that.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Broome's annual Shinju Matsuri festival celebrates its multicultural heritage and its pearling past and present. The annual parade is a raucous procession of locals having fun.

But this year there's a serious message in the line-up. A small group of people are doing what many in Broome are yet to do - publicly and emphatically oppose any gas development. They're worried about the environmental impact and the Pilbara-style changes to their community.

VOX POP: Rents will go up higher, we'll have more fly-in-fly-out people that are very disconnected from the community come here to spend money on alcohol, on drugs. I think a lot of those problems will get worse.

PPP: A month ago Four Corners reported on boom times in the Pilbara - the West Australian money pit driving the national economy. On the ground, there was more pain than prosperity.

RAY SKENDER, SKENDER CONTRACTING (Excerpt from "The Money Pit", "Four Corners" - August, 2008): Everyone comes up here hoping to make a big dollar, then they find out they can't get accommodation. The infrastructure up here's just ridiculous.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Rather than growing communities, centres like Port Hedland were being gutted and the divide between the haves and the have-nots was as wide as an open cut.

(Excerpt continued):

LINDA DOOGIEBEE, BUNARA MAYA HOSTEL: Now, mining boom-town has come, it just blew everything out, blew our people away from each other.

REAL ESTATE AGENT: Port Hedland, we've got a three-bedroom, one-bathroom, for \$1400 and a five-bedroom, two bathroom for \$1500 a week.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: The story resonated strongly in Broome. Locals watched and wondered if they were looking at their own future.

VOX POP: A lot of the have-nots get pushed out and you get to the stage where local people can't even afford to stay here.

CHRIS MAHER, COUNCILLOR, SHIRE OF BROOME: I think there's some social impacts that we might not be ready for and I think there'll be a bit of a breaking down of those values.

The difference in community between Pilbara towns and Broome are greater than the physical miles that separate them.

MATTHEW CARNEY: If the Pilbara is on the edge of nowhere, the Kimberley is beyond it. And off its lonely coast, the Browse Basin is a vast, so-far untapped reservoir of natural gas rivalling the North West Shelf.

A number of resource companies have big plans for the Browse. Japan's Inpex and its joint venturers are raring to go. The other big partnership is being lead by Woodside.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: We in our joint ventures could not commercialise the fields for a long time because they are remote - 400 kilometres off shore Broome, deep water, difficult to commercialise. The current strength of the LNG market we think now gives us a potential opportunity to make them commercial and to make them commercial through LNG.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Turning natural gas into Liquefied Natural Gas requires expensive and expansive refinery operations just like Woodside's LNG trains on the Burrup peninsula near Karratha in the Pilbara, one of the country's biggest emitters of CO2.

In the Kimberley, the State Government proposes a so-called hub site to contain the industrial footprint - 10 square kilometres shared by multiple users.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: We would estimate that during construction is when of course the most direct jobs would be generated. We estimate that would be between 2,500 and 3,500 direct jobs; ongoing operations, somewhere between 300 and 400 direct jobs; billions of dollars of tax revenue and of economic development for the nation and the region.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Big money, big multinational companies and powerful political forces, but this man has become the central player in this whole drama.

Wayne Bergmann heads the Kimberley Land Council - the peak Indigenous body here.

He's got the backing of the Federal Government and well before the recent WA election the State Government gave traditional owners of the Kimberley the power of veto over any gas development.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: We believe that this project is about creating our own opportunities. We're trying to get a deal that actually establishes a foundation that leaves a legacy for the future generations.

MATTHEW CARNEY: More than half the Kimberley's massive expanse is under Native Title. Over 50 per cent of the people who live up here are Indigenous. It underpins his power, as does the support of the senior lawmen of the Kimberley.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (to Aboriginal men): So, I feel good standing on my own turf. My great-grandfather Fujenchus (phonetic) was just born other side here near the creek, near Wanwinmal (phonetic).

MATTHEW CARNEY: Wayne Bergmann is a son of the Kimberley, schooled in the traditional ways of Aboriginal culture and law by these men - Joe Brown and John Watson. They also sent him to Perth to study whitefella law.

JOHN WATSON (to Wayne Bergmann): This is the opportunity that we have to show the world that, Australia, that we're doing the right thing by our people you know.

MATTHEW CARNEY: He'll need every ounce of know-how to achieve what he's set out to do - make the biggest, most comprehensive deal the world has seen, and that means part-ownership of the project.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (to Aboriginal men): Because these are big international gas companies they need to lift the bar. You know, they need to make everyone in the world look at it and say this is the right way in a modern day time to do agreements in the world.

VOICEOVER (excerpt from ABC TV, 1978-80): Aborigines met at Nookanbah Station yesterday to symbolically reclaim their land from the West Australian Government. The Corroboree was attended by people from the Nookanbah community and Aborigines from other parts of the Pilbara and Kimberley...

MATTHEW CARNEY: The fight to get the best deal for the Indigenous people of the Kimberley started in 1978 at Nookanbah. Aboriginal protesters put their bodies in front of mining trucks to stop them drilling for oil at their sacred sites.

(Excerpt continued):

VOICEOVER: Singing their sacred Aboriginal songs.

MALE (to protesters): Liable to arrest if you don't move.

VOICEOVER: When it was over, 22 people had been arrested.

(End of excerpt)

Wayne Bergmann's mentors were a core part of the struggle. They stood together and fought. Eventually they were pulled off their land but the dispute forged a wider resistance and out of that the Kimberley Land Council was born.

JOHN WATSON: We got organisation out of it.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to John Watson): And how important has that been?

JOHN WATSON: It's very important to us, very important to this day.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They got their land back but everyone here believes getting the most out of the gas deal is a continuing part of the struggle.

JOE BROWN: I want to see things happen from our power. That's what I'd like to see.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (to Aboriginal men): We've got to make this process for a long term; this outcome from the scheme has got to be for the long term for everyone.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The challenge now is to lift Indigenous people out of disadvantage using proceeds from the gas development.

To execute his plan, Wayne Bergmann is playing hardball with the developers. Never before has an Indigenous leader been front and centre in such a high stakes game.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: If the companies ain't going to engage with us in a meaningful way that is going to create legacies and have a compensation package that creates precedents in the international community, if they're not prepared to negotiate about what that means then they're not welcome in the Kimberley from our perspective.

MATTHEW CARNEY: To sell his vision Bergmann has been traversing the Kimberley for about a year briefing the 23 distinct language groups in the region. It's an arduous task but it's coming to an end.

(Excerpt from presentation):

ABORIGINAL MAN (to audience): Welcome everybody here to (inaudible) community. I think it's going to be a hard issue. It's not going to be easy to think about because we've got to make a decision whether we go together or we don't go together.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (to audience): Okay, thanks for that. There is a chance for Gadi Gadi (phonetic) to say yes or no whether they want this area to be still part of the consideration or whether you want to take it off the list.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: Today he's at the Gourdon Bay community, about 160 kilometres south of Broome. They're one of four coastal groups still in line to possibly host the gas plant.

The proposed site is a shallow bay with huge tidal movement. If big LNG tankers are to get in and out of here there would need to be significant, on-going dredging.

(Excerpt continued):

MALE (to audience): The Government or the people that are going to build this facility are going to have to spend lots and lots of time and money understanding what the dredging impacts are going to be on the local community and on the sea bed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What about all our fish life? The fish environment? You know, every year we get these different seasons, we get this salmon and all that, and then the summer season we get all the coral fish, reef fish. So I mean if they're going to do dredging we will be losing all of that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2: We just got our land back and now we are going to uproot the fishing and our survival you know.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: And there are concerns about how any money is to be divvied up.

(Excerpt continued):

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3: Playing the devil's advocate then, why should we share all that money we're making from the gas?

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: Because one of the conditions the State Government is saying is they want to see a benefit sharing model. If traditional owners won't come up with a benefit sharing model, the Government are talking about they will just do it themselves.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: Bergmann's arguments are straight forward. The potential pay-off is big. The deal would mean jobs, better education and health - ultimately a better future for the next generation.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (excerpt continued): So very critical point in time right now. There is a strong belief that we need to try and take control of our own future and work out how we can balance these things. The future is not with us relying on Government but whether we can carve out our own future.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Let them know that we exist, Gadi Gadi (phonetic) people.

ABORIGINAL MAN: If we could all raise our hand, if we can all raise them so that everybody can say ... yes.

(End of excerpt)

MATTHEW CARNEY: The traditional owners could have pulled out today but decided to stay on the shortlist.

THOMAS KINGS JNR, TRADITIONAL OWNER, GOURDON BAY: We see this as an opportunity more than anything and with any opportunity I think people need to consider the sacrifices and even be called upon to make sacrifices and I think that's where we find ourselves today.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The pressure is on to finalise a site by the end of next month. Of the KLC's shortlisted four, Gourdon Bay is the southern-most site.

Far to the north is Anjo Peninsula. There's James Price Point - the closest site to Broome. And then there's North Head, thought to be favoured by developers for its deepwater close to shore, a flat hinterland and its proximity both to the Browse and to Broome.

ALBERT WIGAN, TRADITIONAL OWNER: It's going to change the water, it's going to change the land, it's going to change the sky, it's going to change the air we breathe.

MATTHEW CARNEY: North Head is where we find Albert Wigan.

ALBERT WIGAN, TRADITIONAL OWNER: I believe we as Aboriginal people have been put in a position to compromise who we are in regards to our connection to the land, solely to cater for industrial development.

MATTHEW CARNEY: He's perhaps the most outspoken critic of the KLC process and a staunch opponent of the gas hub development.

ALBERT WIGAN, TRADITIONAL OWNER: It's going to divide us because money, that's all money has done to my people. And the more money, the more bigger the tension, you know. And having an industrial hub here well then you can imagine how big the warfare amongst our own people is going to be, you know.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Kimberley's oldest Catholic Church still dominates the landscape but the old mission of Beagle Bay is now one of the larger communities on the Dampier Peninsula and the closest to North Head.

Traditional owners here believe the gas development is the only way to get the services Government has failed to deliver.

MARY O'REERI, TRADITIONAL OWNER: Being in this position is that we have to look at the balance in terms of the environment, the culture. And if it provides quality of life to our people on the ground, to the Indigenous people on the ground, that is, I'll be grateful of that.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Beagle Bay is where Albert Wigan is raising his young family. He's thoughtful, articulate and puts his views forcefully, but with no broad, unified opposition to speak of, he's little more a thorn in the side of the KLC campaign.

ALBERT WIGAN, TRADITIONAL OWNER: And I've got a great concern for the kids that are growing up. You know, they're going to grow up into communities. This beautiful country that I've lived in, that I've been fortunate enough to grow up in, it's not going to be here for them.

Industry comes in here, industry are going to have rules and regulations that will tell them where they can go and where they can't go on their traditional land. Industry will tell them that they will no longer be allowed to go out and hunt for their traditional food because of safety and health reasons. Industry will then start putting rules on other areas that they feel that they need to extend to, you know.

And so industry are going to have such a negative impact on our people in this area.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: We can't have a situation where all our mob live in poverty, live in third world conditions, have high suicide rates, have low education standards while our environment is the most pristine wilderness where we don't have any development. We've got to be able to find the balance.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Just up from North Head in Pender Bay another young family is building a life and a small business.

Lenny O'Meara is a traditional owner who came back to country. He and wife Jacinta run a small eco-tourism venture - camel rides and camping. Their three children were born here and are home schooled here.

But the O'Mearas are bracing for big change if an LNG plant comes to North Head.

JACINTA O'MEARA: I don't know if we could still live here.

LENNY O'MEARA: It's something we'd have to I guess wait and see until, if they build...

JACINTA O'MEARA: Yeah. I don't know how close you can actually live to a gas plant.

MATTHEW CARNEY: There are about 20 Indigenous owned eco-tourism ventures like this on the Dampier Peninsula. Lenny O'Meara believes these businesses represent an alternative model of development that can deliver jobs and a sustainable future for Indigenous people and the area itself.

LENNY O'MEARA: Look at our community. We have all our bush. We have lots of birds and we have lots of wildlife. We have lots of people that live here. We have lots of people that visit this country. If they want to go see what gas does to a country go and look at Port Hedland, Karratha and Port Hedland, that's what, you know, that's what it creates. What, they're going to bring all the same problems up here?

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Kimberley Land Council claims to be running an exhaustive consultative process but the O'Mearas say they feel like they don't have a voice. They're deeply sceptical about any benefits and the motivation.

LENNY O'MEARA: Compensation, it's going to fix all our problems is what I'm hearing, you know, but they're just blinded by the dollar. You know for me I just see it's an ego trip for Wayne Bergmann to be facilitating this sort of process.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Betsy Donaghey): How would you assess Wayne Bergmann's role in that?

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: A real leader, really attempting to bring those groups together, absolutely determined to make sure they have the information required to make a good decision.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: This is pretty close to the mouth of the Fitzroy River. I grew up on this river. My grandparents and my parents brought me here as a kid. We've fished and camped all along here.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Born and raised in Derby, north of Broome, Wayne Bergmann's journey from cradle to crusade wasn't exactly straight and narrow.

Like many other Indigenous kids, Wayne Bergmann left school early at 15 and could barely read and write. He fell into petty crime and eventually got in trouble with the law.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: Extremely depressing time in my life. It was a point where I personally contemplated suicide and was so ashamed of embarrassing my family and everyone about it, yet when I look back on it, it was such a small little thing. And I often think about that because I see that happening to a lot of other young Aboriginal people. And if it wasn't for the family around me that helped me get through that point, I wonder whether I would have been here today.

And that's part of the things that drive me about when I go to communities and see the poverty people are living in, the feeling of despair, that I feel that I've been given a gift and an opportunity to try and make that change.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Kimberley's Indigenous communities may dominate the debate but there are other voices straining to be heard.

To hear them and see what they are fighting for we have to go where no road can take us, so it's a two-hour helicopter flight from Broome to a place called Freshwater Cove on Camden Sound, midway between two of the favoured hub sites.

HELICOPTER PILOT (to Peter Tucker, over radio): I'd say we probably saw oh, a good six pair I suppose, you know the big ones and a few young ones hanging around. Some of the young ones just playing with the mums and annoying the living daylight out of them as they usually do.

PETER TUCKER, "SAVE THE KIMBERLEY" (over radio, to pilot): Yeah we would have seen probably seen about 10 pair so between the two boats we probably would have seen 40 whales just in that little area this morning.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Peter Tucker runs a tourist camp up here. He's also head of a group called "Save the Kimberley".

PETER TUCKER, "SAVE THE KIMBERLEY": It's happening way, way too fast for everyone including the Indigenous people and I'm sure there is a ground swell out there. As soon as they know exactly what's at stake, I believe that we will have a

campaign that will make the Franklin River campaign look like a tea party, and that's what we want to achieve.

MATTHEW CARNEY: "Save The Kimberley" is a ragtag bunch of eco-tourism operators and greenies and they're not a very savvy or sophisticated lobby, but at least their position is firm and clear.

The group is saying "no way" to an LNG plant on the Kimberley Coast.

Peter Tucker reckons there's little national concern because very few know what's up here - pristine ecosystems unspoilt by human kind.

PETER TUCKER, "SAVE THE KIMBERLEY": If such a push, such industrialisation of this scale was going to happen around Uluru or on let's say Great Keppel Island, Australians would be up in arms, but because they don't know the Kimberley, I guess they're ignorant, ignorant of the facts.

MATTHEW CARNEY: In the years he's been here Peter Tucker has come to know the Camden Sound area like the back of his hand. On any of his runabout treks he's likely to encounter scores of endangered green turtles on one of Australia's biggest in-shore reefs, Montgomery Reef; and at this time of the year in enormous number, humpback whales.

What's been learned and incredibly, only recently, is this area is a major maternity ward for humpbacks. The warm waters are a safe haven.

PETER TUCKER, "SAVE THE KIMBERLEY": You know, we're seeing probably in excess of 400 individuals, 500 individuals maybe more coming through here.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Most of what's known about whale activity off the Kimberley coast, and it's still scant, comes courtesy of dedicated amateurs, people like wild-life photographer Richard Costin.

RICHARD COSTIN, WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER: Yeah, this is a great image here - just a cow, just tail slapping there, and the calf with her. I was just going through a narrow channel...

Self taught and after 25 years of observation in and around Camden Sound, he's become the acknowledged authority on whales.

RICHARD COSTIN, WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER: It's a very, very important area not just as a maternity ward but also a training ground for the calves so when the calves are born the cows are actually using the tides and using the reefs in those areas to actually teach the calves what to do and just teach them the ropes before they've got to actually head back down to Antarctic.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They're known as the Group 4 whales. Like the east coast's Group 5 population, they make their way north to breed and then - like those in our underwater vision filmed between here and Exmouth further south - they head to the food-rich Antarctic. The mid-Kimberley coast is the nursery and the migration highway - here and back - runs between the Browse and the coast.

RICHARD COSTIN, WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER: If you have major industrial development in these areas you have a massive increase of industrial shipping so you're talking about LNG tankers, condensate ships, barges, supply boats, tugs and other sort of ancillary craft. And just the movement of that, the physical movement of those boats through the area and also the industrial noises that's created by those boats in my mind would most definitely push the whales out of that area.

MATTHEW CARNEY: In scientific terms the Kimberley and the Browse Basin waters are woefully under-researched. This is one of the few scientific teams sent to study the area.

It's telling that last month during just their second expedition here, scientists from the West Australian Marine Science Institution captured a stunning first, filming a courting ritual of humpbacks before their migration south.

DR STEVE BLAKE, WA MARINE SCIENCE INSTITUTION: It seems to me that they were acting quite boisterously and it may be that it's a staging area before they head down south where the female is choosing her escort and the males are the suitors trying to win, I guess, the right to accompany the female down south.

MATTHEW CARNEY: They've just started to scratch the surface and say they'll need another five to 10 years and a larger, coordinated, scientific effort to unlock the mysteries of the Kimberley.

DR STEVE BLAKE, WA MARINE SCIENCE INSTITUTION: You could probably describe this area as one of the last great marine wildernesses because so little is known. It's a wild and rugged place and it's been out of sight out of mind. But obviously there are other pressures in the area coming on and I think it's important that we get that baseline information now.

PETER GARRETT, FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT MINISTER: To those who know how beautiful, how significant, how important, how naturally, really special it is, we won't be wanting to see and neither will anyone else - proponents, governments, stakeholders or NGO's - developments which diminish its values.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The Federal Government has launched a major environmental assessment of the Kimberley that's due to report in about two years.

The Environment Minister dismisses concerns from environmentalist and scientists that it's rushed. He says he won't sign off on anything until he's convinced he's got the whole picture.

PETER GARRETT, FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT MINISTER: There's no end to the depth of knowledge in an area of such extraordinary beauty as this, I'm well aware of that. At the same time it is well within our capacities and the capacity of our scientists to make sure that we have adequate information at our disposal in order to make sensible decisions that set the bar where it needs to be for ecologically sustainable development. That's the over all remit of the national environment legislation. I intend that we'll meet it.

MATTHEW CARNEY: As the Minister contemplates the Kimberley's future, strangely he and other key decision makers aren't feeling the heat of any large scale environmental protest.

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: There's a certain pragmatism that even many of the environmental groups now seem to operate under. Things are inevitable so we don't fight them.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Author Pat Lowe is one of the Kimberley's best know environmental identities.

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: It seems to me that we need some places on earth that are not industrialised and we were hoping that the Kimberley would be one of them.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Pat Lowe): And do you think you've lost it?

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: If this goes ahead, we're certainly, as I say, I don't know if we've lost it but it's the thin end of the wedge I would say.

VOICEOVER (excerpt from archive footage, ABC TV 1990): The site of a camp that Pat Lowe shared with Jimmy Pike for three years.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Pat Lowe spent years close to nature in the desert with artist husband Jimmy Pike.

PAT LOWE (excerpt continued): It was a bit like Eden really. That may sound cliched but it was, it felt a bit like Eden...

MATTHEW CARNEY: And formed the green group "Environs Kimberley" to combat plans to dam the Fitzroy River. That was an old school green campaign of trench warfare and fixed positions. This is not.

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: And perhaps we've gone beyond the days when we want to do, you know, heroic protests and things like that.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Pat Lowe): Do you think that's what's needed in this case?

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: Yes, if it comes to it. I think we should really go out on a limb over it.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Environs Kimberley now has a different leadership. Last December it and other major environmental groups including The Australia Conservation Foundation and WWF gave qualified support to a single hub development if, among other things, Indigenous needs were met.

It signalled a new way - consulting not opposing.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Maria Mann): So why aren't you saying no?

MARIA MANN, ENVIRONS KIMBERLEY: We are, because we're considering all of the evidence before we make our decision. I mean that's what rational, sensible people do. They look at all the arguments, they collect their data, they collect the evidence and then they make a call on it.

PAT LOWE, ENVIRONMENTALIST, AUTHOR: Up here I think there's some anxiety about crossing swords with Indigenous people point of view or Indigenous organisations' point of view because obviously the environmental movement and the Indigenous people have been working together pretty well, especially up here.

When "Four Corners" shone a light on the lot of Indigenous people missing out on the mining boom in the Pilbara it came as no surprise to Aboriginal leaders in the Kimberley. They're well aware that after decades of mining activity down south, conditions in many parts of the Pilbara remain squalid.

There are many desperate places in the Kimberley as well. Mowanjum near Derby is one of them.

ABORIGINAL WOMAN (speaking to Wayne Bergmann): Some houses have to bring in sheltering other children because other family have no roof over their heads.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (to Aboriginal woman): Okay, a lot of problems with housing.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The failures in the Pilbara offer stark lessons for the deal-maker and others hoping a gas deal will bring change here.

ABORIGINAL WOMAN (speaking to Wayne Bergmann): Children, it goes that way in that suicidal way because there's nothing here for them.

MATTHEW CARNEY: One aim is to create communities like Jarlmadangah, further east. On land bought back from white owners, elders have ushered a move away from welfare dependency to self reliance.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: So yeah it's the ultimate form of self determination I think is being played out over the next couple of months in the Kimberley.

MATTHEW CARNEY: At Jarlmadangah, booze is under control and residents run the school and their own businesses. Bergmann wants other communities to follow the lead here.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (giving presentation to Aboriginal community): So Bucket A is for whose country it's built on. Gas agreement sets up this flow...

MATTHEW CARNEY: The big plan is based on big money.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL (presentation continued): Then we have a chunk in benefit sharing bucket that all the other groups can get access to it. But before they can access it they have to agree that if they have a big agreement in their country they have to share it.

(At another presentation): We talked to them about the environmental studies. For Nyul Nyul again there was no decision to say yes or no to this area. What does that mean for the rest of the area?

MATTHEW CARNEY: More than 50 outback Power-Point presentations later, the KLC's demands are crystallising.

It's chasing multi-layered revenue from the gas project so all communities benefit, a so-called through-put deal - income flowing in from each litre of gas, rental from the site. But perhaps most contentious is its push for equity - part-ownership and a place in the boardroom for Indigenous representation.

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: From experience if Indigenous people aren't sitting on the decision making boards we find that our issues are generally left to the side. So equity that brings that type of participation is really important I think to create world's best practice.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: Well in fact the discussions are so preliminary, equity hasn't even been raised.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Betsy Donaghey): But you would assume knowing what's gone before and what's been in the media that they want world's best practice. Now you know that's equity.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: I actually, there's one thing I'm confident of they will want world's best practice. I'm not certain that will include equity.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Betsy Donaghey): So, but world's best practice defines ownership these days.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: It can define things such as business participation. I think what it really defines is a sharing in the benefits that the development will bring, including asset gross over time. I believe that can be delivered perhaps through equity, but perhaps through other means as well.

MATTHEW CARNEY: It's a high stakes game that's being played on ground that's shifting as dramatically as a Kimberley tide. The certainty promised by WA's previous Labor government is no longer possible.

ALAN CARPENTER, FORMER WA PREMIER (at press conference): I wish Colin Barnett well as he prepares to take up his role as Premier of our amazing State.

COLIN BARNETT, WA PREMIER-ELECT (at press conference): There are a number of major projects around this State that need to be brought to fruition - plenty to be done.

MATTHEW CARNEY: The recent dramatic election and change of Government has altered assumptions.

COLIN BARNETT, WA PREMIER-ELECT: The traditional owners certainly have a legitimate and legal right to be involved in any discussions about the land and the site. They basically hold Native Title over much of that area. But they should not have a right of veto. No citizen should have a right of veto in that sense.

MATTHEW CARNEY: And the companies themselves have multi-billion dollar alternatives. They've signed preliminary supply contracts and the pressure is on.

SEAN KILDARE, GM EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, INPEX (archive footage - July 2008): The project is proceeding at a very fast pace to meet the incredible and hungry global demand for energy.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Inpex declined our request for interview but it's well known it's firming up plans to skirt the Kimberley and pipe its gas 850 kilometres to a plant it may build in Darwin.

SEAN KILDARE, GM EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, INPEX (archive footage - July 2008): With our first LNG shipment away late 2013 to early 2014.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Woodside says it could pipe its gas a thousand kilometres to its established site in the Pilbara.

BETSY DONAGHEY, WOODSIDE PETROLEUM: We believe that bringing Browse gas to Karratha would be technically viable.

MATTHEW CARNEY: In all these scenarios Wayne Bergmann may well have overplayed his hand and the anticipated benefits will vanish.

MATTHEW CARNEY (to Wayne Bergmann): So where does that leave you then? Where does it leave your plans and your vision to, you know, bring your people out of disadvantage?

WAYNE BERGMANN, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: Well I think there are many other opportunities that we will have to turn our minds to and pursue.

MATTHEW CARNEY: Until that time, the Kimberley wilderness may win out and remain unchanged but the Kimberley's Indigenous communities will also stay the same.