

Aboriginal body raps Inpex for NT move

JESSICA STRUTT and AMANDA BANKS

The head of the Kimberley Land Council last night attacked Inpex for deciding to build a gas processing facility in the Northern Territory, accusing the firm of "sitting on its hands" on proposed Kimberley sites.

KLC executive director Wayne Bergmann said traditional land owners had negotiated in good faith with Inpex but the company pulled out late last year over uncertainties created by State and Federal processes.

He believed Inpex was so determined to develop its LNG plant on the Maret Islands, off WA's Kimberley coast, that it simply showed no interest in sites for a processing hub on the Kimberley mainland.

He defended the role of traditional owners, saying criticism that they had forced Inpex to move the project to the NT "bordered on gutter tactics".

Mr Bergmann said the Aboriginal people had done all they could to gain the project for the Kimberley and met all timelines for potential sites.

"We were informed in December last year that Inpex weren't engaging any further with traditional owners

'People negotiating on behalf of Aboriginal people overplayed their hand.'

PREMIER COLIN BARNETT

until they understood the implications of the strategic assessment announced by the State and the Commonwealth," Mr Bergmann said.

"Ever since then, Inpex sat on their hands in terms of pursuing development options in the Kimberley.

"It was based on this Inpex had a 'decide and defend' position on Maret Islands, rather than finding out where in the Kimberley is it doable."

Colin Barnett said yesterday that Eric Ripper's decision to give Aboriginal groups the right to "veto" the project was the last straw for Inpex, which had been left in an untenable position in its bid to locate a site.

The loss of the Inpex project, which would have generated thousands of jobs, training and services, had cost Kimberley Aboriginal people a chance of economic independence.

"To some extent, unfortunately, I think the people negotiating on behalf of Aboriginal people overplayed their hand," the Premier said.

The WA Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies called for a review of environmental and indigenous affairs approvals processes.