

# Pearl farms warn of damage and disease

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WA's \$200 million-a-year pearling industry has warned it will push for compensation if a proposed LNG precinct in the Kimberley harms its operations.

Pearl farms operate near the site preferred by Colin Barnett at North Head, 26km north of Beagle Bay, and at shortlisted sites Gourdon Bay and James Price Point.

Pearl Producers Association executive officer Brett McCallum said the industry wanted to be involved in talks on any site development.

Pearl farms operated in pristine waters off the Kimberley and operators were concerned about pollution, increased boat movements and marine pests being introduced.

Of particular significance was the Gourdon Bay site at the head of 80 Mile Beach, home of the world's last wildstock pearl oyster fishery.

"This fishery provides over 70 per cent of the annual pearl oysters required for pearl culture in WA," Mr McCallum said. "The importance of the current flows in this region to pearl oyster larvae settlement cannot be underestimated."

The industry's biggest fear was over any sort of introduced marine pest which could attack pearl oysters and the closing of areas where pearl oysters could live and be harvested.

Any developments requiring a pearl farm to move would draw a call for some "compensatory mechanism", he said.

It was important that the 150-year-old industry maintained its reputation for the highest quality pearls in the world.

Premier Colin Barnett said he welcomed views on the site for an LNG precinct in the Kimberley. These could be put to the Northern Development Taskforce during a 28-day public comment period.

JODIE THOMSON