

Likely site for gas hub



WEST Australian Premier Colin Barnett has earmarked a whale migration area near an Aboriginal reserve as the likely location for a gas infrastructure project off the pristine Kimberley coast.

Releasing the Northern Development Taskforce report, which shortlisted the four possible sites, the Premier said last week the role of the taskforce, set up by the former Government, would be scaled back.

Public comment period

The four short-listed sites would now be subject to a 28-day public comment period, but North Head, 26km north of the Aboriginal community of Beagle Bay, was the most attractive, Mr Barnett said on Wednesday.

He said he was keen to proceed with the 1000-hectare hub, offering shared facilities to companies keen to exploit the Browse Basin and Ichthys gas fields.

The Government-owned project would include a shipping channel, worker accommodation, a township, possible sharing of power and water supply and road access, but not gas processing.

The Premier also revealed that he would scrap the right of veto promised to the traditional owners of the land by the former Carpenter Government.

"I respect and welcome the full involvement of Aboriginal people, but no group in our community will be given a legal right above the rest of the community," he said.

Mr Barnett said delays caused by the right of veto had contributed to WA losing the \$25 billion Inpex plant to Darwin last month. But he said there was a 'glimmer of hope' the project could be saved.

The State Government would attempt to acquire the land at North Head, part of an Aboriginal reserve, by negotiation. But it could be determined in the courts.

Opposition Leader Eric Ripper warned Mr Barnett against the compulsory acquisition of traditional lands, saying negotiation and consultation would deliver a faster outcome.

"Indigenous people in the Kimberley are supporters of development," he said. "If the minority Liberal Government goes down the path of compulsory acquisition, they open themselves up to prolonged delays, division and tortuous legal action."

Kimberley Land Council Chief Executive Wayne Bergmann urged Mr Barnett to ensure Aboriginal people were not marginalised and said development must deliver lasting benefits.

"Traditional owners will support development that brings lasting economic benefits, while balancing environmental and cultural values," Mr Bergmann said.

"The Liberal-National Government has the opportunity to make sure the resource boom delivers benefits to the wider community.

"But to do that there must be meaningful economic participation for traditional owners

and Aboriginal communities in gas development in the Kimberley."

Mr Ripper also said Mr Barnett's decision to name his preferred site was irresponsible and ran the risk of jeopardising the public consultation process.

Woodside Chief

Executive Don Voelte said he supported North Head as the preferred site, and a spokesman for Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett said the Rudd Government welcomed the opportunity to continue to work with the State Government through the joint strategic assessment framework.

Issues with each site

The four sites earmarked as having best met the criteria are Gourdon Bay, south of Broome, James Price Point and North Head, both on the Dampier Peninsula, and Anjo Peninsula, on the far north Kimberley coast.

Mr Barnett said each site had issues which would need to be addressed by government, but the necessary work would be done to see the final site confirmed as quickly as possible.

The Premier acknowledged the commitment and effort of the Aboriginal community in helping identify the sites in a constructive and timely manner.

Public submissions on the site options can be made until 11 November. - With AAP



WA Premier Colin Barnett