

No veto power for traditional owners: Barnett

By Nathan Dyer

THE announcement of a preferred site for a LNG processing hub on the north-west Kimberley coast by Premier Colin Barnett has drawn criticism from Aboriginal and greens groups.

Mr Barnett released a short list of four potential sites, including North Head, Gourdon Bay south of Broome, James Price Point on the Dampier Peninsula and Anjo Peninsula, saying North Head is his preferred site.

Mr Barnett said his government would not be following the previous Labor Government's protocol of allowing the right of veto to the traditional owners of a preferred site.

"No group in the community will be given a legal right above the rest of the community," Mr Barnett said.

He said the government would look at compulsory acquisition if it had to.

The naming of North Head has angered environmental groups who say the location, between Broome and Cape Leveque, is a major whale nursery.

Conversation Council of Western Australia director Piers Verstegen said the Premier's identification of North Head as his preferred site was of extreme concern.

"The Northern Development Taskforce identified North Head as

having many significant environmental impediments to development, including pristine coral reefs, mangroves forest and proximity to the Kimberley whale nursery," Mr Verstegen said.

He said Mr Barnett's announcement showed disregard for detailed scientific advice and important stakeholders, including traditional owners.

Kimberley Land Council chief executive Wayne Bergmann urged the Premier to work with traditional owners.

"The best way to ensure a positive outcome for companies, communities and government in relation to this development is to work with traditional owners to secure their support."

He said the government had the opportunity to ensure any development delivered benefits to indigenous people.

"That means ongoing involvement and jobs in the long term, not money to shut up and go away."

He said the Premier's approach suggested a development at all costs mentality.

"The modern way of doing business must be to ensure that developers share the benefits that come from our State's resources with the communities in which they operate."

A public consultation process in relation to the four preferred sites is open until November 11.