

Collision course over gas project

- **Tim Clarke**
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Beagle Bay residents have made their feelings very clear.
Photo: *Supplied*

Premier Colin Barnett, the Kimberley Land Council and the residents of Beagle Bay appear on a potentially fiery collision course over a proposed gas development in the north of the state.

The Land Council led by CEO Wayne Bergmann will present a submission to the State Government today, voicing their concerns after communities in Beagle Bay were informed of plans to begin drilling for geological tests at North Head within weeks.

One site, north of Beagle Bay, was blockaded by locals over the weekend - but Mr Barnett said yesterday that rather than harming the area it would bring jobs, social benefits, and a significant economic bonus.

"It is important for the Kimberley that we do find a site, my preference and I think the industry's is North Head but that process is going on," Mr Barnett said.

"The state will act to secure that site so we can have development of LNG, a clean high-tech industry because without that the benefits of gas and employment and social packages for local people, including Aboriginal people, will not happen.

"This has been consulted extensively and I can assure the people of the Kimberley and the people of WA a development of an LNG site will not impact adversely on the environment of the Kimberley."

Traditional owners however say the government is pushing ahead with the gas development without considering the total impact on people and environment.

The Land Council said there was a need for more social and environmental impact assessments.

“We are calling on the Premier not to create another situation like the Burrup Peninsula, where development was rushed through over the top of people, and environmental and cultural heritage was destroyed,” Mr Bergmann said.

“It is not responsible to push ahead with a decision on any site before we know what all the impacts on people will be.

“Coming in over the top of people or threatening compulsory acquisition won’t deliver an appropriate site in a timely manner, and won’t deliver the benefits from the resource boom the Premier has promised to the Western Australian community.

“That is the way things happened in the past, when Aboriginal people were given no resources to deal with mining companies, or opportunities to take part in decisions about resource development.”

Local Aboriginals set up a roadblock to stop senior members of the Government’s Northern Development Taskforce entering the community for a consultation meeting with residents.

On a website set up to oppose the proposed development - <http://handsoffcountry.blogspot.com/> - videos show the blockade being prepared, and the strong feelings of local people toward the project.

But Mr Bergmann said traditional owners would support any plan, as long as it balanced business with the impact on the area.

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

“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.”