

Owners voice LNG concerns

By BIANCA THAIR

TWO indigenous leaders from the Kimberley have taken their opposition to LNG development to a wider audience and called on the Federal Government to intervene in the process.

Albert Wiggan and Neil McKenzie last week travelled to Sydney for the premiere of Baz Luhrmann's epic *Australia* to spread their message of frustration over potential industrialisation in the region.

Mr Wiggan said he did not want to see the Kimberley exploited.

"The Kimberley does not belong to West Australia ... it is an invaluable piece of Australia, indeed the globe, that needs to be protected," he said.

Mr Wiggan said his family and the community were "deeply distressed" by what he claimed was WA Premier Colin Barnett's plan to fast track a decision and not conduct proper environmental and cultural assessments.

"Premier Barnett appears hell-

bent on disregarding the concerns of traditional, let alone non-traditional owners living on the sites proposed for development," he said.

Mr Wiggan said the assessment process established by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett had been truncated.

"Only the mining industry appears to have the WA Government's ears," he said. Last week Mr Wiggan was met with a standing ovation when he spoke about LNG development in the Kimberley in front of 4000 people at a concert by musician Xavier Rudd in Perth.

Australian actor Jack Thompson has also weighed into the debate, lending his voice to a cinema advertising campaign to coincide with screenings of *Australia* over the next month.

Mr Thompson said in the recorded voice over: "The Kimberley, one of Australia's last great wildernesses is under serious threat from industrialisation, why can't we leave this special part of the planet

untouched?"

The Kimberley Land Council last week gathered a group of traditional owners in Broome to meet and take questions from media on gas development.

Wayne Barker, a spokesman for the Jabirr Jabirr people from James Price Point, one of the four short-listed sites for a gas hub, said any development would have a huge impact on "the country and people".

"We would like to see the process continue as long as we get informed, we can't make a decision about anything unless we know all the facts," he said.

Lee Bevan, representing the Nyul Nyul people from around North Head agreed. "Traditional owners are prepared to make hard decisions but we must have all the information we need," he said.

A decision is expected to be made on a site by the end of the year.



FORUM: Nyul Nyul traditional owners Mary Attwood and Veronica Francis in Broome last week