



Premier Colin Barnett must tread lightly in the Kimberley

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Western Australian Premier, Colin Barnett, has indicated that he will soon select a site on the undeveloped Dampier Peninsula coast, north of Broome, for large gas processing infrastructure and port facilities.

This tropical marine environment is in excellent condition and is frequented by threatened species like the dugong. The coastline also has sites of great cultural significance for local aboriginal communities.

"Most stakeholders have accepted that the Browse Basin gas fields off the Northwest coast will be exploited; the challenge is to find an environmentally- and culturally-appropriate location to liquefy the gas and to provide meaningful regional benefits to aboriginal people, wherever this processing occurs," said WWF's WA Program Leader, Paul Gamblin.

"The evaluation work is not finished and case has not been made for Kimberley development."

WWF has argued that developed areas of the Pilbara should be fully assessed as an alternative location for these large gas facilities, and that the selection of any sites before the full joint State-Federal strategic assessment is complete would be premature and lead to great uncertainty. The EPA is expected tomorrow to provide advice on the site assessment process thus far, before the next intensive phases of impact assessment begin.

"WWF is calling on Premier Barnett to leave the door open for the consideration of Pilbara sites before he makes any final decisions. After all, the oil and gas industry itself is keeping alive the Pilbara option," Mr Gamblin said.

"The previous WA Government and the Rudd Federal Government worked with the community, scientists and industry to assess a range of development options for gas development. It was a fast-tracked, 'look-before-you-leap' approach based on science, dialogue and informed consent for aboriginal communities. Unfortunately these principles may now be compromised, and the main assessment only got as far as the Kimberley."

"The logic was that if there were no suitable sites found in the Kimberley, then appropriate Pilbara options would be examined. Now that scientific assessments, many Traditional Owners, and key regional business interests are raising serious

concerns about locating large gas processing infrastructure on the Kimberley coast, Premier Barnett has the opportunity to finish the job and to work with the community to openly and efficiently assess Pilbara options."

For more information

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