

Protests as gas plans go ahead

By STEVEN HOUNSOME

A VOCAL crowd of more than 250 concerned residents took to the streets of Broome last week to protest against a proposed LNG hub on the Kimberley coastline in the same week Premier Colin Barnett backed the compulsory acquisition of land at James Price Point or North Head.

The crowd, which included dozens of children with banners and a grim reaper on stilts, took some time to find voice.

But after impassioned speeches from Neil McKenzie, Save the Kimberley's Kevin Blatchford and Beagle Bay resident Albert Wiggan, a strong chant of "gas free Kimberley, hands off country" arose.

Mr McKenzie told the crowd; "we are united as one because we have the same dreaming."

"People come to this country for one reason only - to appreciate how unspoilt it is," he said.

Mr Blatchford mocked Premier Barnett's assertion that neither of the favoured sites were of value for tourism.

"We already have an industrial

precinct, it's called the Pilbara," he said. "And I'm more interested in eco-tourism than eco-terrorism."

He then outlined his safety concerns over development, citing recent incidents at Varanus Island and Esperance and even suggested LNG could lead to al-Qaida terrorist attacks and a higher incidence of cancer.

Mr Wiggan said a price could not be put on an area with such traditional importance.

"They say there's no heritage left on this place (North Head) but we all know that's a lie," he said.

"I don't think Colin Barnett was expecting this (rally) from a little town like Broome."

But he called on the group to reach out to the wider community, saying they could not win the fight alone.

"If Barnett thinks this is inevitable he's got a big fight on his hands," he said.

A march down Hamersley Street with a police escort then followed, ending at Male Oval with a speech from Marty Sibosado - who said it was particularly sad indigenous rights were being ignored on the 60th anniversary of the

Declaration of Human Rights.

Coinciding with the Broome protest, concerned community members gathered outside mining company Woodside's Perth office.

The Wilderness Society also wrote to the company, indicating that due to the economic downturn there was no need to fast-track Kimberley development.

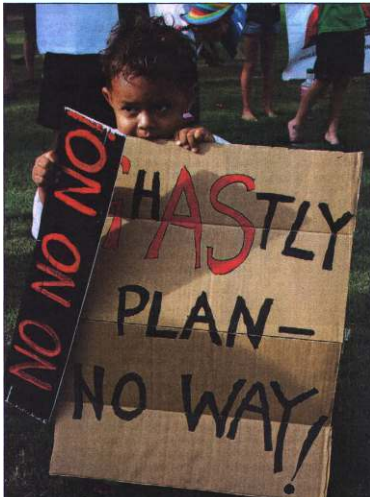
Two days earlier, Colin Barnett told about 500 Chamber of Commerce and Industry members that James Price Point, 50km north of Broome, and North Head, a further 75km north, were the only sites still being considered.

He also confirmed land would be acquired through the Public Works Act and leased to users.

"That may sound radical, I assure you it's not," he said.

"That is the way that most industrial land in Western Australia has been acquired and operated."

The Greens and Australian Conservation Foundation have both slammed the acquisition of land as an outdated approach which ignored Aboriginal rights.



MESSAGE: Luis Kentaro Matsumoto makes a point last week.