

EPA rejects two WA sites for LNG hub

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Two of the sites favoured for a liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure project in Western Australia are too environmentally sensitive for the multi-billion dollar development, the environmental authority says.

Four sites have been short-listed for the 1,000 hectare LNG gas "hub" near Broome, which would offer shared facilities to companies keen to exploit the Browse Basin and Ichthys gas fields.

The West Australian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has given the okay to two sites but has knocked back the location favoured by West Australian Premier Colin Barnett and another site.

Mr Barnett on Friday said the WA government would make a decision on the hub site within days and would not rule out compulsorily acquiring land.

The EPA said there were two sites where environmental risks and impacts were most likely to be manageable - Gourdon Bay, south of Broome, and James Price Point, north of Broome, on the Dampier Peninsula.

It said North Head, the location favoured by Mr Barnett, was too environmentally sensitive for such a large-scale industrial development.

The area, 26km north of the Aboriginal community of Beagle Bay, had a humpback whale calving and resting ground immediately offshore, as well as 12 to 14 indigenous settlements within 10km of the site.

The other site ruled out is the Anjo Peninsula, one of the northernmost points of WA.

The EPA said the area was a remote wilderness where "terrestrial biophysical values" could be compromised by the precinct and the building of any transport route to access it.

But the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) said that while traditional owners had ruled out a gas development hub at Gourdon Bay, they may yet support proposals for the Anjo Peninsula site.

KLC chief executive Wayne Bergmann said a taskforce had warned of the effects of dredging on marine turtles, dugong and whales sharks known to inhabit the Gourdon Bay area.

However, he said the land council believed the Anjo Peninsula proposal should be pursued.

There were "significant flaws" in the EPA's recommended rejection of the site, Mr Bergmann said.

Mr Barnett, who has nominated James Price Point as his second choice for the precinct, said he would prefer a consent agreement that took in community and industry concerns, but would not rule out compulsory acquisition of land.

"Without being dramatic, if this land is not secured by the state and then available to be leased out to proponents of LNG, then there will be no LNG project in the Kimberley and there will be no benefits for the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley," he said.

The government-owned LNG project will include a shipping channel, worker accommodation, a township, possible sharing of power and water supply and road access, but not gas processing.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) said while the EPA had named Gourdon Bay and James Price Point as suitable sites, it had reiterated the need for more formal environmental assessment of both areas.

ACF's acting northern Australia program manager Justin McCaul said despite Mr Barnett's warnings that he may seize Aboriginal land, the Browse Basin gas fields were in commonwealth waters.

Any decision on an LNG hub would be subject to approval by the federal government under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, he said.

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